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A
L E T T E R
FROM A
BLACKSMITH
TO THE
MINISTERS AND ELDERS
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

IN WHICH
THE MANNER OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN THAT CHURCH
IS CONSIDERED;

ITS INCONVENIENCIES AND DEFECTS POINTED OUT;
AND METHODS FOR REMOVING THEM HUMBLY PROPOSED.

K. T. A.

A NEW EDITION,
Prefaced by a brief Account of some late Publications
ON THE
LEADING POINTS AT ISSUE
BETWEEN
Protestant Dissenters and the Church of England,
BY THE EDITOR.

*Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing
before God: for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth: therefore let thy words
be few.*

Ecc. v. 2.

I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

SOLD BY MESSRS. RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

1791.



ORIGINAL ADVERTISEMENT.

If in the following sheets the reader finds the Blacksmith now and then introducing scraps of Latin, he will be the less surpris'd if he reflects, that in Scotland most of the mechanicks have a smattering of that language, which is taught even in the country parish schools. It seems the author thought it incumbent upon him, when he had to do with the clergy, to muster up all the little learning he was master of. With what propriety and judgment his quotations are introduced, is submitted to the reader, by his most obedient servant,

THE PUBLISHER.

P R E F A C E.

THIS is the reprint of a pamphlet which has been long known, and much esteemed, both in the learned and religious world. Apart from its apposition to the present prevailing topics of discussion among the serious and thinking of all persuasions, it is written with so much solidity, vivacity, perspicuity, and force, that the credit both of letters and of eloquence seems in some measure interested in its preservation. But, saving a few customs peculiar to the presbyterian form of worship in Scotland, which our *Blacksmith* has specified and exposed, his animadversions apply with singular propriety to the levity, wildness, and foolery, which characterize the public services of religion among several sectaries in England. The sober and rational views here given of that tribute which is due and natural from reasonable creatures to their Maker, Preserver, and Redeemer; of the temper, character, and tendency, of such a devotion as is best calculated to make men happy and useful; and of the proper spirit with which sacred instruction ought to be dispensed, cannot, in the editor's opinion, be

a more

more seasonably pressed upon the public attention, than while the sluggish and heartless formality of semisceptics, the rant and buffoonery of every conventicle, and all the effervescence of the lowest enthusiasm, are new vamped and coalesced to oppose the church, for the charitable purpose of annihilating her establishment, and rioting in her ruins.

In the resolutions, petitions, and various instruments published by Protestant Dissenters, appeals are made to their political exertions with as much gravity and confidence, as if they had exclusively and repeatedly saved the country. The editor has endeavoured, for his own satisfaction, to re-collect such events from the faithful depository of history, as were most likely to inspire the lofty tone in which these men vaunted, and still vaunt, of their merit. Nothing of very great or general importance, he presumed, could have been achieved by them, or any other party in the state, not publicly acknowledged, or even some where recorded to their honour. His research was certainly not without abundance of patience and industry; but has, notwithstanding, been so abortive, that he has not been able to ascertain a single fact, which in any degree authenticates their allegations.

The inference he would draw from this characteristick circumstance is happily and
ably

ably supported by *Historical Memoirs of Religious Dissension* * just published. These *Memoirs* demonstrate, by a series of proofs palpably incontestible, all his suspicions of false pretension, and lay open the whole system of imposition and deceit, whence the church's adversaries have hitherto borrowed their most plausible arguments.—This is not all. The detail, instead of disclosing important obligations conferred on the community at large by their public spirit, actually brings to light such a catalogue of black practices, perpetrated under the fairest pretexts, as ought to cover the whole body with confusion, and shut their mouths for ever.

The author commences his relation by stating it as a maxim, that the dread of Popery has ever been the foundation of dissenting patriotism. Tests however were not levelled against Papists, but originated in separation, and were designed for a criterion of the principles and allegiance of the nonconformists; for even in that early period of our history the Catholics were peaceable and harmless, compared with other sectaries, whose turbulent disaffection to the established church threat-

* This seems to be only a detached portion of a very large work, intended by the author to comprehend the whole complex question between Protestant Dissenters and the Church of England. And every friend to our present happy establishment, and its unimpaired transmission to posterity, cannot but wish the argument by this eminent master of reasoning speedily published, and liberally encouraged.

ened the constitution both of church and state.

The visionary and ill managed policy of Charles the First afforded them an opportunity of gratifying their utmost ambition. But the moment they grasped the reins of government, whatever they had claimed for themselves with so much clamour was peremptorily refused to all others: and they were as wanton in the exercise as they ever have been eager in the acquisition of power. Our Liturgy was universally proscribed, both in public and private worship, under severe penalties. In the famous treaty of the Isle of Wight it is positively stipulated that the ill-fated monarch should not even be indulged with the Book of Common Prayer for the private use of himself and family.

Nothing more emphatically marks their steady perseverance in these factious enterprises, than the part they affect to have acted in effecting the Restoration. The facts our author states on this pretension, only heighten the character always entertained of their sinister and intriguing politics. The army, guided and fired by independent leaders, stript them of power, and deprived them of all prospect of safety. This drove them to cultivate a temporary alliance with the church, and, impelled by a sense of their own danger, they prudently co-operated with her in the resumption of monarchy and opposing Popery, which was then the common enemy.

Their

Their motions in this manœuvre are sufficiently plain from what happened in the subsequent reign, which, in the author's forcible phraseology, presents us with the singular phenomenon of *a Popish King a strenuous advocate for universal toleration*. The clergy were then in disgrace for their fidelity to an obnoxious establishment, and the Dissenters received into favour by a government to whom both were equally detestable, with this difference, that the former maintained their integrity, while the latter abandoned in an evil hour all their former professions.

The share they had in accomplishing our glorious revolution is given in the words of their own historian, Bishop Burnet. It is such an instance of their *attachment to the establishment*, and *their zeal for civil liberty*, as the real friends of both ought never to forget. The power usurped by government of commanding the *declaration for liberty of conscience* to be read from the pulpit, was such an arbitrary suspension of penal law, and opened such a door for Popery, and even Paganism, that the clergy were alarmed by the measure, and met it with all the resistance in their power. This brought upon them all the vengeance which a bigoted court could inflict. The six Bishops in particular, who would not read the insidious mandate, were committed to the Tower by the express advice of the Dissenters. Here the author observes, with his usual pertinence,

“ The abettors of this notorious trans-
“ action have then in truth the merit of
“ greatly promoting that glorious revolution,
“ which a few months afterwards was ac-
“ tually completed by the expulsion of an
“ infatuated bigot from the throne, and the
“ re-establishment of the constitution.”

He means not to assert that the ancestors of Protestant Dissenters were the *unprovoked* authors of those convulsions which were occasioned by *religious dissensions*. He seems aware of all their sufferings and hardships, and says, with great justice,

“ We are not then to wonder at their
“ restlessness, and frequent attempts to sub-
“ vert the government, since it was the only
“ chance they had of gaining the upper
“ hand, and of securing to themselves that
“ liberty, which this memorable revolution
“ has so effectually established. We are ra-
“ ther to wonder at that paradox in politics,
“ in which the present advocates of the Dis-
“ senters have involved their cause, who,
“ whilst they are challenging, in behalf of
“ their forefathers, an eminent share of me-
“ rit in constructing that beautiful fabric,
“ the present constitution, are equally lavish
“ in their applauses of the descendant, for
“ his pious attempts to deface the noblest
“ monument of his ancestors’ wisdom.”

During the reigns of King William and Queen Anne the turbulent spirit of religious dissension was not idle. The settled aversion
conceived

conceived and cultivated by the first of these princes against the Church of England was considerably fomented by the intrigues of her hereditary enemies, whose leading policy was to strengthen his prejudice against the hierarchy, in proportion as they found him inclined to promote their interest. They also constituted the very soul of the whig faction, which involved the conclusion of Queen Anne's reign in so much trouble. In those various political feuds which then participated so palpably of their spirit, the bills against *occasional conformity*, and to *prevent the growth of schism*, which stained the liberality and clemency of the times, originated.

It does not consist with the brevity of this analysis to trace the political conduct of Dissenters with minuteness. From the accession of the house of Brunswick to the throne the same nefarious system of factious interference with our establishment hath been uniformly prosecuted through various periods with different degrees of success. Their machinations, according to our author, even in our times, have been sufficiently serious and alarming. Of the riots in the year *eighty* he thinks them not altogether blameless. Perhaps it may not be easy to give a softer construction to the circumstances and facts on which he founds his opinion. They then endeavoured to over-awe the legislature, and have but lately and openly menaced the free-

dom of election, and by that means aimed a deadly blow at the vitals of our constitution.

The author, in a note under page 5 of this masterly performance, describes the difficulty he experienced in compiling these memoirs, so as to render them applicable to his argument, in words peculiarly characteristic of Protestant Dissenters. "There is no small address," says he, "in comprising the various sectaries under one general denomination of Protestant Dissenters. Under this ambiguous term the advocates for dissension appeal to history, under the cloak of Presbyterianism, for instances of conformity and rigid attachment to establishments, and, as occasion may serve, they shift to independency in proof of their maintenance of religious freedom and liberty of conscience. The answering such immethodical writers may be compared to the diversion of *hunting the duck* in the words of Monsieur Bayle; *When I have him in full view, and fancy him within my reach, he slips from me, takes a dip, and becomes invisible.*"

Notwithstanding many home strokes which the cause of dissension receives from our author in the course of his enquiries, he omits no opportunity of acknowledging the worth of individuals. It is the spirit of a dangerous faction he investigates and detects, and no blame attaches to any but in proportion as tainted or influenced in temper or conduct

by that spirit. And the most respectable in the party ought to be reminded that, as Shakſpeare ſays,

The mildew'd ear may blaſt his wholeſome brother.

This black picture of Proteſtant Diſſenters is but too literally verified by their recent exertions for repealing the whole ſyſtem of our teſt laws, which flung the country into ſome degree of ferment, and which brought upon themſelves merited but unexpected obloquy and defeat. The friends of the church, in the criſis of her danger, flew to her reſcue with a ſpirit and ability which did equal honour to both. *A Review of the Caſe of the Proteſtant Diſſenters, &c.* has been univerſally aſcribed to the maſterly pen of the preſent Biſhop of St. David's. This publication was rudely enough called for, while the party flattered themſelves his Lordſhip had been ſilenced by their clamour, or ſhy of rousing a ſleeping lion. It ſeems indeed to have ſtunned them, or ſtruck them dumb, as it remains to this moment unanſwered. Coupled with various other well written tracts, which then appeared on the ſame ſide, it proves, were there any doubt of the fact, that the higheſt ſituations in our church are happily occupied by ſuch as are fully competent to her defence.

The perfect diſcomfiture which attended their triple application to the laſt parliament was

was suddenly followed by Mr. Burke's publication, which humbles and mortifies them more perhaps than all the other checks they have experienced. The author's established celebrity, the fresh popularity he acquires at their expence, the infinite eloquence, ridicule, and decision, which distinguish his reasoning and conclusions, the rapid and extensive circulation this brilliant exposure of their principles commands, and the general conviction and applause it extorts from every species of readers, are circumstances which they cannot but feel and regard as hostile to their interest, and inauspicious to their hopes. It is indeed a wonderful exhibition of genius, principle, and sensibility, and has occasioned a multiplicity of answers. All the demagogues and leaders of frustrated ambition, both male and female, have assembled under the standard of faction to repel the influence that would restrain their licentiousness, or teach them decency. And every stickler for the French fashion, in new modelling church and state, puts in for the privilege of insulting Mr. Burke, and of libelling and lampooning, under pretext of replying to him, the church, the government, the king, and the priesthood.

Enough of mischief, as we formerly experienced from the zeal and assiduity of American incendiaries, it would seem this ill fated source of our misfortune is not yet wholly exhausted. Like all sectaries who
dissent

diffent from general opinion or practice, and fond of her recent distinction, this new empire continues the old habit of sending out her emissaries, who *compass sea and land to make proselytes*. Since *Rights of Man** has been published, we can easily account for the obvious embarrassment of all Mr. Burke's former opponents. They justly conceived his work to be a vindication of our boasted constitution in church and state, and are eager to prove his reasoning illogical and inconclusive. The ground they take is hostile to the success of their intentions. But whatever they mean, none of them have courage enough to tell Mr. Burke, or the world at large, that neither church nor state is worth preserving. This mighty discovery, in all its plenitude and emphasis, with a whole magazine of similar science, America pours out upon us gratuitously, that she may compensate the defalcation of territory we owe to her perfidy, by the wreck of a constitution she would glory to subvert. Big with *Rights of Man*, and inflamed with all the zeal and ardour of an ancient apostle, in anticipating the hope that the "New World may rege-

* By Thomas Paine, *Secretary for Foreign Affairs* in the American War, and Author of the Work entitled *Common Sense*.—It was once my intention to have presented my readers with an analysis of this singular production; but it occurred to me that it was impossible to exhibit the author's sentiments fairly, without violating the respect due to public decency; and that, in more senses than one, *to be too busy there is some danger*.

nerate the Old," Mr. Paine attacks every thing in this devoted country deemed hitherto most sacred and valuable, with all the sophistry, rage, and buffoonery, he can borrow from the levelling paradoxes of Rousseau, or the ribald wit of Voltaire. The only principles he avows is, that there is none, and that men are in every sense their own masters. Much as he vaunts of new light or new reason, it affords him no data on which to rest, but in the negation of whatever has been always considered as binding and obligatory in the ancient and modern world. All prior institutions, human, divine, or moral, civil; or political, he totally subverts, for the sole purpose of making one grand, universal experiment of theories bottomed in the destruction of every vestige of power, property, distinction, and influence, that yet remain among men. Revolutions are never out of his head; and he is constantly pressing upon our view such as would rid us indeed of many *ills we have*, but plunge us at the same time in *others that we know not of*; and which present us only with a government without magistracy, obedience without law, legislation without legislators, religion without worship, virtue or vice without rewards or punishments, men without sentiment or passion, harmony without order, and society without subordination.

There are however who demur to this arrangement, as displaying more novelty than wisdom,

wisdom, more temerity than prudence, more pride than philosophy, more sarcasm than science, and more pedantry and paradox than either reason or principle. No discovery yet made in the history of our nature, ethics, politics, or theology, gives any reason for us to hope that this earth of ours will ever be the habitation of human beings purely intellectual; that these refinements of theirs will ever coalesce with the wishes, or answer the exigencies of men like themselves; that principles of pure abstract reasoning can ever be rendered practical, or executed by agents who have bodies as well as souls, and hearts as well as heads; and that these enlightened and speculative notions will ever realize their projected revolutions of political regeneration, unless perhaps among the docile inhabitants of some spiritual and utopian country in fairy land. While our affairs at least continue to flourish, individuals of this happy and highly favoured island will remain the same grateful, industrious, peaceable, and complaisant creatures they have always been. And all the talents for the fabrication of constitutions, and the organization of states, which distinguish the theories of our modern political reformers, who would reduce all our feelings, sentiments, impressions, and preferences, to their own frigid and repulsive standard of stubborn apathy, will never be able to form or discipline a society absolutely unexceptionable, while the members who compose it are thus erroneous and peaceable. Indeed, whatever

whatever shew of perfection their untried system may exhibit in its inert state, as its parts have a seeming correspondence to the effects designed, its symmetry is rather that of a statue than a man, and gives the proportions of a body rather dead than alive. It is only in the movements and actions of the machine, when all its springs and faculties are in exercise, that we can judge with propriety of its combined excellence, the adaption of its principles, and the unison of its functions, to one great and general end.

How then does the account stand between Mr. Paine and Mr. Burke; and which of their speculations are most likely to terminate in general utility? Mr. Paine, in a country of which he is not a subject, and where he professedly sojourns as an alien, boldly libels her government, her laws, and her constitution; and, collecting as into a focus, all that her worst enemies have ever said against her in any shape, according as they meant to traduce the sovereign, slander the church, or insult the people, loosen the obligation of society, or worm the heart out of individual felicity, he levels it like a monstrous piece of ordnance, and discharges it in her face. This is true American gratitude, of which we have had much sad experience, and the only return he makes for the best blessings England bestows, and all the liberties and privileges he still enjoys by her indulgent and benign institutions! But if ever man felt the great and sublime satisfaction of essentially contributing
to

to the happiness of his fellow creatures, by cherishing and augmenting their political content, by impelling them with new motives to a cordial acquiescence in their present situation, by rendering all their social and civil duties more eligible and more practicable, and by doubly enhancing the value of all their civil franchises, that blessing is eminently Mr. Burke's. Thus happy is the exercise of true genius when virtuously directed; thus honourable and exemplary is the duty of a good citizen suitably discharged; thus valuable are the acquisitions of literature, philosophy, and eloquence, appropriated to enlighten the minds and improve the well being of the species.

A few months previous to the last application of Protestant Dissenters to Parliament for a repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the attack on our establishment assumed a new shape. *Hints*, &c. supposed to have been written by a peer of the realm, made their appearance, and strongly urged a revival of our liturgy. In this address the service of our church was severely censured, and many disrespectful insinuations thrown out against her clergy. From the high rank of its reputed author, from the novelty of a nobleman interfering with the wranglings of theologues, from a certain elegance of expression,

pression, and from the plausible manner in which arguments often enough refuted are here repeated, the pamphlet was certainly more read than it otherwise deserved.

Very able replies, however, were soon published; and that which drew most attention by the superior ability it displayed, was *An Apology for the Liturgy and Clergy of the Church of England*. Here the doctrines inculcated by the *Hints*, &c. were so pointedly confuted, and the confidence inspired by the temerity and celebrity of that performance so effectually defeated, that much solicitude was shewn for discovering the author, and not a little artifice adopted for discrediting his reasoning. A striking instance of this kind, and which, from the lead the writer takes in the controversy, and the probability of his delivering the genuine opinion of the party with whom he associates, on the subject in question, rather than from any superlative merit in the production, may deserve some attention, is an *Address to the Right Rev. Dr. Samuel Horsley, Bishop of St. David's*, by Gilbert Wakefield, B. A. on the Subject of an *Apology for the Liturgy and Clergy of the Church of England*.

It is a doubt with me whether this author is not aware of his error in giving the *Apology* thus confidently to the Bishop of St. David's. Alas! what individual honoured with a seat on that venerable bench might not be proud of the imputation! Indeed this man seems
sensible

sensible of the high respect he pays our church in supposing her blessed with dignitaries so capable of exerting themselves thus ably in her behalf. The palpable hesitation which betrays the doubtful state of his mind is a proof to me that he is none of those readers whom the *internal evidence* of the *Apology*, as he would have it somewhere believed, will lead to conclude that it comes from the Bishop of St. David's. It is convenient, however, for him to persist in a conjecture which affords him an opportunity of saying many things which might not hit so palpably in an oblique direction. Honest Sancho Pancho could tell him how much more prudent it is to take a *flock of sheep* for his enemies, than his enemies for a *flock of sheep*. But who has not observed that our modern reformers have the same antipathy to the church as mad dogs have to water. All or most of their enmities center in a mitre; a mitre affects them nearly in the same manner that royalty has lately done the inhabitants of St. Luke's Hospital; and a mitre is the monster of whom they successively engage to rid the world. No animal in nature is so hateful and irritating to them as a Bishop; of all schismatists he is most popular who succeeds best in badgering a Bishop: and this unfortunate *Apology* had not probably roused the resentment of Mr. Wakefield, but that it is generally ascribed to a Bishop.

It ill becomes him who is reprovable to reprove. They only who are faultless may correct the faults of others. In condemning imperfections of which we are conscious we condemn ourselves. Heavy and manifold are the charges of asperity and foul language brought in this *Address* against the *Apologist*. The reader will see by the following brief selection from the *Address* how the account stands between them. *Dogmatic insolence—malicious misconstruction—angry and malicious writer—contemptuous buffoonery—insult paralleled only by the effrontery of the assertion—incivilities—indecent freedoms—falsehood, peevishness, acrimony—meannefs truly despicable—envenomed shafts of personal abuse—cowardly—insidious—immoral—mislead others by deception—sophistical declamation—conceited and insolent apologist—uncharitable insinuations—Rabbi Horsley—puzzle-pated mortal—ply you briskly with this ipecacuanha dose till you regurgitate again and spue—ambidextrous versatility of a Grecian conjuror—puddle of swelling words—ridiculous and impertinent—accuser of the brethren—one of those contemptuous sneering writers who deserve to be beaten with many stripes—monstrous doctrines of legendary churchmen.*

That my readers may determine for themselves with what propriety this rough phraseology is adopted, let them candidly peruse the *Apology* from beginning to the end. They will inevitably perceive and be struck by the contrast between it and the *Address*. The

Apologist writes in the language of soberness and truth, and is answered by passion and abuse. We find reason and discretion in the one, rage and extravagance in the other. The *Apologist* drops not once the demeanour of a gentleman, and the *Letter-Writer* scorns to assume it. The former fills and warms the understanding and the heart with the love and the light of truth, *as it is in Jesus*; but the only sentiments created by the latter are indignation for prostituted talents, regret for human imbecility, and contempt for the blusterings of abortive dogmatism.

Much triumph is arrogated by our author on the victory gained by himself and coadjutors over the advocates for orthodoxy and legal establishments. But may not their presumption, as well as the presumption of others, be the stale resource of party impotence? It is surely of little consequence which of the combatants think they have won, while the public, or great mass of the people, who are the only competent judges, think, decide, and otherwise assign the prize. We seldom find the best reasons on any subject from the most opinionated: and Mr. Wakefield's arguments will be the less convincing to his opponents, that his own convictions seem so very strong.

Notwithstanding Mr. Wakefield puts himself forward as the mouth-piece of a party who have wriggled themselves into momentary distinction by traducing creeds, clergy, liturgies,

turgies, establishments, and bishops, whoever expects from him any new light on the matters at issue will be disappointed. Most of his anecdotes, assertions, and information, relate to a subject which he certainly likes better, and is obviously much nearer his heart. We conceive how furiously he would spurn at being deemed an *egotist*, and that on *egotism* he could be as severe as he is on orthodoxy. His only business in this *address* would seem to be with the *Apology for the Liturgy and Clergy of the Church of England*. Here, however, he contrives to say a great deal more about himself, his preferences! his avocations! and his acquirements! This topic seems to possess a charm which fascinates and transports him as by enchantment, somewhat in the manner of the ancient Sibyls, who are said to have announced their oracular responses in an ecstasy. For whatever are his present thoughts, wherever his lucubrations wander, whether he apes the eccentricities of P—ly, or adopts his logomachies, hatches stories of the king, the clerical Heretic and his clerk John, glances by the bye at the subject of debate, pronounces a panegyrick on his friends, or an invective against his antagonists, rails, declaims, quotes Greek, spouts poetry, or splutters prose, he is never at a loss to introduce Mr. Wakefield.

Of his literary gallantry we have an instance in an offer he makes the Bishop of St. David's. It is written in the very style of a modern challenge. “ *Illiterate and wrong-headed as*
“ *I am,*

“ *I am*, I would willingly risk an encounter
 “ with you before competent umpires, with
 “ all your erudition and reputation, touching
 “ some of those topics that essentially enter
 “ into your character as a scholar and a divine.”
 His learned labours are thus stated: “ What
 “ with mathematicks and philosophy at one
 “ time, and theology at another, what with
 “ occasional excursions into the regions of ge-
 “ neral knowledge at all times, *my medio-*
 “ *crity of intellect* has not yet found lei-
 “ sure to investigate the histories of private
 “ churches.” He speaks of his early piety
 in these terms: “ During about five years
 “ and a half almost constant residence at col-
 “ lege, and a *more regular attendance at cha-*
 “ *pel than any member of that society*, I do not
 “ recollect to have heard it [the Athanasian
 “ Creed] once.”

It were indeed a tedious task to specify all
 the prominencies of self-conceit which degrade
 and expose a writer much beneath the rank in
 letters to which abilities like his properly ex-
 exercised are calculated to raise him. In our
 opinion it will be difficult to produce a per-
 formance in the language less temperate in spi-
 rit, less handsome and polite in manner, or
 less decent and liberal in diction, than this *Ad-*
dress: and the author has no reason to be sur-
 prised in finding himself made despicable by
 so rash an ebullition of asperity with every
 man of sense and decency whom he wished to
 please.

We

We have not seen in the whole of this elaborate and tiresome controversy a more convincing argument, or an instance of more elegant and finished reasoning, than that in the *Apology*, which reprobates a *progressive religion* by stating the difference between human and divine science. The *Apologist* very properly urges this as a consideration of decisive importance in the dispute. And Mr. Wakefield, with the whole group of modern Socinians, may well be allowed to feel somewhat sore at such a view of truth, as must clap an eternal extinguisher on all their most favourite theological theories. What other aim or termination can these have, but to rid us at once of the gospel and its author. Nothing could be better devised to afford sufficient scope for that purpose than a *progressive religion*, which has ever been the creed of those who are always *learning, and never come to the knowledge of the truth*. But, by fixing what the real and radical principles of Christianity unalterably are, there is an end of their chicanery and impertinence. And all they have said or can say about improvement, protestantism, intellectual freedom, reformation, new light or discoveries in theology, means no more than a sincere desire of stigmatizing as superstition or bigotry whatever tends to narrow the circle or repress the licentiousness of their sceptical tenets.

Whatever in our author's perturbed imagination should point out the good Bishop of St. David's

David's "as the most proper person for the perusal of his address," we may venture to assure him that worthy prelate will probably never see it. His lordship is seldom in the humour of listening to the buzz of such harmless insects, and, it may well be supposed, few of his friends are in the habit of obtruding on his attention any thing so perfectly beneath it. His time is indeed infinitely too valuable to be wasted in fruitless altercation with vain and contentious minds; and the duties of his high station afford better employment for his great abilities, and more substantial satisfaction than could be derived from the endless and useless trash which envy, that always nestles and nibbles in the vicinity of merit and eminency like a mole under ground, incessantly throws up.

Mr. Wakefield's feeble efforts to discredit the very masterly account we find in the *Apology of Professor Symond's Critical Observations*, the far-fetched eulogium with which he flatters the great man who is supposed to have written the *Hints*, &c. his recourse to the academic menace of castigation and flagellation, the usual style of all pedagogues; the scraps of Latin and Greek which he seems so fond of spouting on all occasions; furnish the friends of the *Apology* with ample materials for retaliation, were they capable of stooping to an imitation of his unpolished severity. It is rather to be presumed they will join with all good men in wishing to see the doughty author, who seems to possess few requisites for polemical

polemical writing, occupied in the more liberal pursuit of general science, for which we suppose him much better qualified. Even lunaticks will talk sensibly on some subjects, and the wisest men never appear so foolish as when they assume an equal acquaintance with all.

These cursory comments on a few recent publications on both sides of the question, between our religious establishment and its opponents, may give the reader some idea of the controversy in its present stage and aspect. The editor conceived this or something of the kind might be no improper companion to the *Blacksmith's Letter*, which demonstrates, by a series of unanswerable reasoning, the gross absurdity of rendering the devotion of a large promiscuous assembly dependent on the temporary ebullitions of an individual. From these sources of the argument in favour of our church, brought together as in the present publication, her friends may derive some assistance, perhaps to repel the occasional attacks which her liturgy, her clergy, and her constitution, may suffer, more especially by the general licentiousness of mixed conversation. They will at least be apprised of her danger, and every body knows how to apply the saying, a *warned man is half armed*.

A
L E T T E R
TO THE
MINISTERS AND ELDERS
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

Right Reverend and Right Honourable,

I HAVE presumed to address you upon a subject, which appears to me of the greatest importance, and worthy of the consideration of the Ministers and Elders of the Church of Scotland; thank God, I have reason to hope, from your wisdom, learning, and piety, that I shall be favoured with a fair and patient hearing, though my sphere in life be low, and my sentiments set off with no other advantages, than sincerity, and truth, as far as I can distinguish it; for God, and my own heart, bear witness, that I present this address with no other view, than to promote, as much as I can, the glory of God, the interests of true religion, and the honour, purity, and peace of the church of Scotland.

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Could I have found any better method of communicating my thoughts, than by a letter, I would willingly have chosen it, or had I hoped ever to have seen a more favourable season than the present, I would patiently have waited for it. But now we are blessed with a learned body of clergy, with a prince, well disposed to promote true piety among his people, and we have the happiness to live in an age, in which the prejudices of parties are mostly worn off, the rage of dispute abated, and men disposed to hear truth, and obey reason; such peaceful, happy days are designed by heaven, and ought to be employed by men, to repair in religion what has been pulled down by mad passions in turbulent times; to restore to its first beauty whatever has been defaced by party prejudices in the days of contention, and to recover the purity of our faith, and decency of our worship, from the rust and low superstition which they contracted in the ignorant ages; and tinctures of enthusiasm they imbibed in the shock and tumult of the reformation. There was no church that met with greater opposition, or was more violently agitated, than ours: and though, thank God, it stood out the storm, yet it suffered very severely; and, when the fury was in some degree abated, and men had time to look about them, our church appeared little better than a ruin; her sacred buildings levelled with the ground, or bare shattered walls, the standing monuments
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of religious madness; her treasures robbed by sacrilegious hands; her registers destroyed, or carried off; her funds applied to profane uses, and her clergy left to starve: would to God she had suffered only in these less essential things.

But along with these she contracted a singular and whimsical taste, her principles of faith grew dark and mysterious, and her method of worship defective and unreasonable. Some of these ruins she never can repair; some of them indeed time has in a great measure patched up; and some of them remain to be repaired by the present rulers of our church, or by succeeding generations: of this kind is our public worship, in which there are several things that demand your serious attention, and call loudly for the diligence and learning of the present age. I presume, with due deference, to point out a few of them; hoping that my poor endeavours may at least obtain pardon, out of respect to the importance of the subject, and the sincerity of my intention; and that some able head and good heart will take the hint, and fully point out the flaws in our present way of worship, and direct us how to amend them. Some unprejudiced and happy genius may perhaps appear, whose persuasive eloquence, refined expression, and conclusive arguments, may command attention, and gain assent; in spite of the bigotry of the ignorant, the vain ambition of those that are fond of

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popularity,

popularity, and the whimsical opinions of enthusiasts. Till such an one shall appear, I hope you will not take it amiss that I offer my remarks, especially as I beg leave to assure you that this my address does not proceed from a fondness of novelty, much less any intention to disturb the peace of the church established by law, or indeed from any other or any worse motive than that her public service may be such as seems best calculated for promoting the interests of religion and virtue, and most suitable for reasonable creatures to offer, and an infinitely wise God to accept.

OF READING THE SCRIPTURE.

First I submit to your serious consideration, whether a larger portion of the scriptures should not be read every Lord's day in our public assemblies. The reading of the scriptures always made a part of the public service in all the churches of God: the law and the prophets were solemnly read* in the synagogues every Sabbath day; our Saviour countenanced and sanctified this practice† with his presence and example; the apostle Paul peremptorily commands Timothy to give attendance to reading, as well as to exhortation and doctrine; and the primitive church religiously observed this command, as Justin

* Acts xv. 28.

† Luke iv. 17.

Martyr* bears witness. "Upon the day
 "that is called Sunday (says he) all that live
 "in the country, or in the towns, assemble in
 "one place, and the commentaries of the apos-
 "tles and writings of the prophets are read, till
 "the time allotted for them be expired." Nay
 more, our own directory for public worship;
 which perhaps may have more weight with
 some than the example of our Saviour, the
 command of his apostles, or the practice of
 the purest antiquity; recommends that ordi-
 narily one chapter out of each Testament
 should be read at every meeting. I am at a
 loss whether to ascribe the negligence of this
 essential part of our service to the pride of the
 clergy, or the perverseness of the people;
 perhaps it may be in some degree owing to
 both; the clergy probably think that it would
 not give them a sufficient opportunity to dis-
 play their own talents; and the people that it
 does not so fully please their ears, always
 itching with the desire of something new.
 To the first I shall only observe, that though
 we have, as we always ought to have, a very
 great respect for the observations and dis-
 courses of our spiritual guides, yet at the
 same time we cannot but wish to hear what
 the *Spirit saith unto the churches*, in his own
 words. We have room to wish for this, as
 we are told by the apostle that the scriptures
are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for cor-

* Apol. ii. p. 28. Tertul. ad gent. p. 47, § 498.

rection, for instruction in righteousness; and that by them the man of God may be made perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It is true you indulge us now and then with ten or a dozen of verses of pure scripture in our public assemblies; but, as we * have no regular plan of reading the scriptures, of consequence we only hear detached places, chosen at the pleasure of the preacher, and applied to what purposes he thinks fit: this leaves our understandings too much in the power of the clergy, and exposes the simple and ignorant, who make the greatest part of our congregations, to be seduced by the party principles and whimsical opinions of the preacher. It may at first sight appear that the whole plan of our worship is as happily calculated for making a property of the laity, and keeping their judgments and consciences in the power of the parson, as any part of the popish system; for the minister needs not to read any part of the scriptures unless he pleases; he may choose what place he thinks proper, may begin where he inclines, and break off when he has a mind; he may mangle them in any manner he thinks fit, and make them say whatever he would have them to say.

But allow me to tell you, that as the reading of the scriptures in public assemblies is

* Our directory declares that it is requisite that all the canonical books be read over in order; but our parsons proceed in a very different method.

of divine appointment, no power upon earth can dispense with the obligation; as they contain the articles of our faith, and the rules by which we are to regulate our lives, nothing can supply, and therefore nothing ought to usurp their place; and as all the reformed churches are agreed that the scriptures are plain in things necessary to salvation, we ought to hear them as they are, without your glosses and comments; nay, what can be more effectual for our salvation, or so proper for instruction, seeing they bear witness for themselves, that the *word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart**; *That it converts the soul and makes the simple wise*†. Is there any thing that can be substituted in the place of the scriptures, from which such great and happy effects may be expected? But if this shameful negligence be owing to the perverse humour of the people, who perhaps may think that the reading of the scriptures is a dry insipid part of the service, you will not, I hope, take it ill if I say, that amusements are more their errand to church than instruction, that they are more desirous of new words than sound doctrine, and that, in fact, their hearts are carnal, and estranged from the things of the Spirit; for the apostle informs us that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit; for they are foolish-

* Heb. iv. 12.

† Psal. xix. 7.

ness to him. Pardon me if I think that your compliance with this humour is like Aaron's to the folly of the Israelites: as he set up a calf made with his own hands to be the object of the people's worship, instead of the living God; so you set up your own compositions, to direct the faith and regulate the manners of the people, in the place of the scriptures of truth, dictated by the Holy Spirit. The service of God in the way of his own appointment ever was, and ever will be, disliked by the bulk of the people. The Jews would willingly have embraced any religion, but that which was given them from heaven; they would have sacrificed in any place but in that pointed out by their Maker; and thought no rites burthensome but those that God was pleased to appoint: but with respect to those the prophet upbraids them with saying as our people say, *Behold what a weariness is it* *. It is the business and duty of ministers to check and resist this humour of the people, and not encourage it by a mean compliance with a vitiated taste, and a base betraying of the trust reposed in them; but, alas! the taste of the people in this coincides with the inclinations of the pastor, and flatters his pride and vanity too much to be restrained; however, with all humility, I presume to beg that you would be pleased to consider how you can answer to God, to your own consciences, and to us your hearers, for such a dangerous and wilful neglect.

* Malachi i. 13.

OF SACRED MUSIC.

As to praise, we seem to study to give this part of our worship as much the air of rusticity, and contempt of God, as possible; because we thought that the engagement of the heart was, as indeed it is, the essence of this part of worship, we have whimsically thrown out every thing that helped to engage and elevate the heart; many of the words we use are obsolete and low, the versification is mean and barbarous, and the music harsh and ill performed; our harmony, otherways not very sweet, is entirely lost, and the sense broke off at every line; our posture too is the most indecent, negligent, and improper for singing well, that we could have contrived; it is true the posture is of no importance, further than as it expresses our reverence to the God whom we worship; yet it is as necessary that it should be decent, as that our words should be proper, for both are only signs of inward sensations. Should we find a fellow crying very bitterly, and dancing very briskly; these are signs of so opposite sensations, that we would be apt to imagine that he was distracted; and what shall we conclude when we hear a congregation addressing God in some ardent hymn, or earnest petition, and see them sitting upon their breech, or lolling with the most negligent air and posture upon their seats? The signs here point to very different sensations! Quintillian seems to think that

that there may be a solæcism in gesture as well as in the expression ; and, if such a thing can be, we seem guilty of a very great one, in using the most indifferent, negligent posture, when we are employed in the most interesting and serious affair ; I mean offering praise to the living God.

OF THE HOLY COMMUNION.

I cannot help thinking that all the rational people of our communion must be shocked with the indecencies and follies that attend the administration of our Lord's supper ; known among the common people by the name of an *occasion*. We accuse the Romish church of superstition, and that very justly ; but in this instance she may fairly retort, and tell us, that we blame in others what we approve of, or at least allow, in ourselves ; for, if our people did not imagine that there was some superior virtue in sermons preached upon these *occasions*, some sanctity in the place, or some merit in their attendance, it is unlikely that such numbers, who have no intention to communicate, should crowd from all quarters, leave their parish churches almost empty, and flight as good sermons, which they might hear without the fatigue of travelling, or the inconveniences that attend a crowd. Superstition in all countries has the same effect, though it may be directed to different objects : in Popish countries people crowd from place to place to visit

visit the shrines of the saints, and pray before the most famous images: in Scotland they run from kirk to kirk as it were after the host, and flock to see a *sacrament* as those to share in a procession; and too many of our people, with shame we must confess, make the same use of our occasions that the Papists do of their pilgrimages and processions; that is, to indulge themselves in drunkenness, lust, and idleness. Most of the servants when they agree to serve their masters, in the western parts of the kingdom, make a special provision that they shall have liberty to go to a certain number of fairs, or to an equal number of *sacraments*; and as they consider a *sacrament* or an *occasion*, as they call the administration of the Lord's supper in a neighbouring parish, in the same light in which they do a fair, so they behave at it much in the same manner. I defy Italy, in spite of all its superstition, to produce a scene better fitted to raise pity and regret in a religious, humane, and understanding heart, or to afford an ampler field for ridicule to the careless and profane, than what they call a field-preaching upon one of those occasions. At the time of the administration of the Lord's supper, ye know, that upon the Thursday, Saturday, and Monday, we have preaching in the fields near the church, which it seems we must not use upon that occasion. I have often thought that the frequency of the sight makes it familiar, and consequently less shocking

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ing to you, or that, being in the inner circle, you seldom have access to see the indecency and absurdity of the whole scene, otherways you would not encourage it. Allow me then to describe it as it really is: at first you find a great number of men and women lying together upon the grass; here they are sleeping and snoring, some with their faces towards heaven, others with their faces turned downwards, or covered with their bonnets; there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making assignations to go home together in the evening, or to meet in some ale-house; in another place you see a pious circle sitting round an ale barrel, many of which stand ready upon carts, for the refreshment of the faints. The heat of the summer season, the fatigue of travelling, and the greatness of the crowd, naturally dispose them to drink, which inclines some of them to sleep, works up the enthusiasm of others, and contributes not a little to produce those miraculous conversions that sometimes happen at these *occasions*: in a word, in this *sacred* assembly there is an odd mixture of religion, sleep, drinking, courtship, and a confusion of sexes, ages, and characters. When you get a little nearer the speaker, so as to be within the reach of the sound, though not of the sense of the words, for that can only reach a small circle, even when the preacher is favoured with a calm, and when there happens to be any wind stirring, hardly can one sentence be heard distinctly at any considerable

considerable distance: in this second circle you will find some weeping and others laughing, some pressing to get nearer the tent or tub in which the parson is sweating, bawling, jumping, and beating the desk. Others fainting with the stifling heat, or wrestling to extricate themselves from the crowd; one seems very devout and serious, and the next moment is scolding and cursing his neighbour for squeezing or treading on him; in an instant after, his countenance is composed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, sighing, and weeping for his sins; in a word, there is such an absurd mixture of the serious and comic, that, were we convened for any other purpose than that of worshipping the God and governor of nature, the scene would exceed *all power of face*.

But when one considers what solemn awe should accompany the pronunciation of his name, and what decent gravity attend his worship, and sees such an unhappy contrast, if his heart be not entirely unacquainted with the feelings of humanity, the sigh will force its way, and the pitying tear start into his eye; especially if he knows that many of the clergy encourage this absurdity; that this is the time when they vie with one another for popularity, and try who can convene the greatest mob; that some of the elders are so fond of these religious farces, that they have threatened to abandon their churches, if the absurd practice of preaching without doors should

should be discontinued; and that even those of the clergy, who have sense to perceive its inconveniencies, and ingenuity to own that it is wrong, yet want courage to oppose the popular frenzy, and resolution to reform what in their own hearts they cannot but condemn. Whether we consider this practice in a moral, political, or religious light, we shall find it attended with very bad consequences: how much must it encourage drunkenness, when such crowds are convened from all quarters? What must the consequence be, when a whole country side is thrown loose, and young fellows and girls are going home together by night, in the gayest season of the year, when every thing naturally inspires warm desires, and silence, secrecy, and darkness, encourage them? When I was a young fellow at my apprenticeship, I was a great frequenter of these *occasions*, and know them so well, that, whatever others may think, I would not choose a wife that had often frequented them, nor trust a daughter too much among those rambling saints. Old maids may perhaps be allowed to revenge themselves of the world by growing religious at the easy rate of running from sacrament to sacrament; and they who are in pain to be provided with husbands may possibly find their account in frequenting those *sacred* assemblies; but I would advise others to go but seldom, and never to a greater distance than that they can return before sun-set; lest, by frequenting them too much, they

they contract an idle disposition of mind, and, by staying too late, they get into a *bad habit of body*.—Nor are the consequences of this practice, considered in a political light, more favourable than in a moral. Our church disclaims all holy days; and I should offend at once against truth and the rules of our church, if I said that we observed any such; but I presume that the number of our idle days will fall very little short of the number in the Popish kalendar; and all the difference is, that their holy days are fixt, and our idle days are moveable; theirs are dedicated to some saint, and ours are devoted to some *occasion*; theirs foster superstition and idleness, and so do ours; theirs are signalized now and then by miraculous cures, by which the patient's health is seldom bettered; and ours by miraculous conversions*, by which the convert's morals are rarely mended, and, to do the Papists justice, they deal more fairly in their miracles than we; for a man can see if a crooked limb be made straight, because it is the object of the senses; but a miracle wrought instantaneously in the mind must be taken upon the word of the patient or parson: but the truth is, their holy days and our idle days, whatever miracles they may produce, do hurt to true religion; the people lose many labouring days by them, and the country is

* See two volumes published at Glasgow, by Mr. Gillies.

deprived

deprived of the fruit of their industry. I have seen above three thousand people at one of these occasions; but supposing that one with another there are only fifteen hundred, and that each of them, one with another, might earn sixpence a day, every sacrament by its three idle days will cost the country much about 112 *l. 10s. sterling*, not including the days that they who live at a great distance must lose in coming and going, nor the losses the farmer must sustain, when *occasions* happen in the hay-harvest, or seed-times; the man of business, when they chance to fall upon market-days, or the tradesman, when any particular piece of work is in hand that requires dispatch; now supposing the sacrament should be administered only twice a year, in all our churches, which if it be not, it ought to be, these occasions, as they are managed at present, will cost Scotland at least 235,000 *l. sterling*, an immense sum for sermons! the greatest part of which might be saved, much disorder and irregularity prevented, would the Assembly be graciously pleased to appoint some particular Sundays in the four seasons* for the administration of this sacrament over all the kingdom. We were too fond of novelties, and perhaps too proud of our own judgments, when we altered established practices, founded on reason, and approved by

* This was the method for several years about the time of the Reformation.

long

long experience; and we could hardly have pitched upon a more unnatural method than the present, consider it in what light you will; for if the design of this sacrament, next to setting forth the death of our Lord, be to remain as a pledge of love and charity among Christians, it does not with us seem at all to answer the design; as our congregations, like discontented children, take a private hour as it were, and eat their bread by themselves in a corner; whereas all the rest of the Christian world do, Christian like, communicate together three times in the year; and as they shew forth the same meritorious death, they shew it forth at the same season, and like brethren sit down at once to the same love feast.

But, besides this, the great noise that we make about these occasions leads our people to lay too great a stress upon them, and to imagine that there is something meritorious, nay that the life of religion lies in hearing a great number of sacramental sermons: they serve nearly the same ends in our Church, that confession and absolution do among the Papists; our people put on a very demure look some days before the sacrament, the gloom gradually gathers upon their faces as it approaches, and they look like criminals going to execution when the day is come. Just so may it be seen in Popish countries, in the seasons set apart for confession and penance; but in both countries the professed repentance

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proves only a flash of devotion, and as if matters were made up with the Deity, and all former accounts cleared, the Papist soon puts off his penitential countenance, and the Presbyterian lays by his sacramental face, and they and we in a little time are the same men that we were before.

And as these *occasions* make our people lay too great a stress upon the outward means, while they neglect the great end of all religion, I mean to better the heart, and reform the conduct; so they raise contention, heart-burnings, envy, and factions, among our clergy, while they contend for popularity; vie with one another who shall convene the greatest crowd, and work up the mob to the highest pitch of enthusiasm; and they often succeed so well, that they bring the weak and ignorant to the very brink of downright madness. I have seen scenes of this nature that had much more of the fury of the bacchanalia, than the calm, serious, sincere devotion of a Christian sacrament. It is here that the ministers display that false eloquence which catches the crowd, and consists in a strong voice, a melancholy tone, and thundering out at random damnation, death, and hell, fire, and flames, devils, darkness and gnashing of teeth; any one who has good lungs, and can borrow the beggar's cant, and the Merry Andrew's action, may become very popular, and make a great figure at an *occasion*; for the contention there is not who shall
reason

reason most justly, deliver most gracefully, or direct their discourse in the best manner for bettering the heart, and reforming the manners of the audience; but who shall appear most frantic, cry loudest, speak with the deepest, strangest, and most hollow tone, and be most wrapt up in mystery and scholastic terms. I have known these qualifications make nonsense triumph over sense, ignorance be preferred to learning, and incoherent, unintelligible, nay contradictory rhapsodies, be received with admiration by the gazing crowd; while plain, learned, and pious sermons, delivered with a becoming modesty and gravity, have been preached almost to the empty pews. Quintilian, assigning the reasons why the ignorant orators were heard with more applause by the mob than the ingenious and learned, paints so justly the methods by which our ministers contend for popularity at the occasions, that the passage is worth transcribing. *Clamant ubique, et omnia levata (ut ipsi dicunt) manu, emugiant, multo discursu, anhelitu, jactatione, gestu, motuque capitis furentes—mire ad pullatum circulum facit—cum ille eruditus modestus et esse, et videri malit—at illi hanc vim appellant, quæ est potius violentia**.—The art

* Quintil. inst. lib. ii. cap. 12. They always cry loud, and deliver all their discourse in a sort of extasy, with a hollow bellowing tone, a frantic action, deep sighs, furious gestures, violent tossing of their arms, and mad-like motions

art of managing mankind, says Mr. Addison, speaking of quacks in physic, is only to make them stare a little, to keep up their astonishment, and to let nothing be familiar to them; this art is perfectly well understood by our parsons; for at these occasions they try who shall make the people stare most, and sometimes they make them stare so long and so eagerly, that the poor people turn almost stark-staring mad. We are damned an hundred times over in one day, and damned too without any sort of discretion; for most of our ministers that I have had occasion to hear seem to have embraced, and do certainly propagate, Hoadley's notions of the sacrament of the supper; and yet they go on damning us still, when their master says, and they sometimes say, that the communion is little more than a mere ceremony. Poor laymen, I own, ought not to presume to dictate to the parson what notions he is to embrace and teach; but I humbly hope that we have a right to expect that the parson be consistent with himself, so far at least as not to damn us, where at other times he teaches us that there is no danger.

But, as it is not likely that these opportunities of speaking *great and swelling words* *

tions of their heads. It is wonderful what effect these things have upon the surrounding mob. A man of learning suits his pronunciation and action to his subject; chooses to be modest, and to appear so. They call this delivering their discourse with force, though it be rather with fury.

* 2 Pet. ii. 8.

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will be given up while men are so *presumptuous and self-willed*, I submit to your consideration, whether it would not be proper to pitch upon the place designed for the scene of the field preaching, at least upon the communion Sunday, at a considerable distance from the church: this would draw off the mob, the contrast between the solemn action within doors, and the comical scene without, would be less striking; the communicants would breathe a freer air, they would be less distracted in their devotions, have easier access to come up to the table, or to return to their seats; and the whole might be transacted with less bustle and confusion, and with more decency and order. As it is managed at present it is liker any thing than the administration of the supper of our Lord: not a man amongst us would be content with a common meal served up in such confusion. I am sure that it is impossible for me, and I believe it is very difficult for any one to carry up with him that sedateness of soul, and calmness of thought, that I presume to think are necessary when he approaches the table of the Lord. How should he, when he is forced to wrestle through a crowd, to push and be pushed, stunned with a general hubbub, the seats rattling, the galleries sounding, the people singing, the communicants jostling one another in the crowded passages, some falling, others fainting, and in all corners of the church hurry, confusion, and noise? I never see our
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tables* filled up, but it gives me an idea of the distraction at Babel, when the confusion of languages began to be felt. I submit it whether the apostle's censure of the Corinthian church be not pertinent here, *This is not to eat the Lord's supper*†.

Perhaps the communicants should be left a little more to their own meditations; at least, for my own part, I could wish that while the elements are handing about there were observed, if it be possible, a solemn and universal silence, that we might have time for our private devotions, and an opportunity to ask the blessing of God upon his word and ordinances; especially as it is either forbidden, or become unfashionable with us, to do so when we take our seats, or finish the service. These things I have mentioned, and I submit my thoughts to the wisdom and candour of the rulers of our church.

PUBLIC PRAYER.

There still remains a very solemn and interesting part of our worship, I mean that of public prayer, upon which I beg leave, with all submission, to make some few remarks, earnestly

* In the kirks in Scotland they have long tables, at which they sit and communicate: they will hold about an hundred or more, and when these remove to make room for others there is the utmost confusion, as the kirk is crowded with spectators, and one part is struggling to get from the table, and the other wrestling to get to it.

† 2 Corinth. ii. 20.

entreating

entreating that they may be considered with calmness and impartiality by your reverences and the other members of our church ; and that, though my sentiments should not please, yet in charity you will believe that I wish well to the Protestant cause, the interest of religion, and the purity and peace of the church of Scotland. These, I presume to think, would be greatly promoted by the composition and establishment of some devout liturgy, or form of prayer, for public worship. Have patience, and hear me out ! I was once as much prejudiced against a proposal of this nature as you can be at present, and if you will consider the inconvenience that attends our present way of worship as calmly as I think I have done, you may perhaps see the necessity and advantages of a form of prayer as clearly as I do.

I beseech you then to reflect that our present extemporary way of worship is contrary to the practice and opinion of all mankind, in all ages, and of all religions ; until it was introduced amidst the ferment and confusion of the fifteenth century : for before that time, whatever was the object of men's worship, whatever the matter of their prayers, or however widely they differed in the articles of their creed, yet they agreed as unanimously in the use of forms of prayer for their public worship, as they did in the belief of a God. Greeks and Romans, the Magi, and the Mahometans, Jews, and Christians, have all

agreed in this practice. I have often heard our Maf^rs John, honest man, urge the universal consent and opinion of mankind against the atheists as a proof of the existence of a Deity; if this argument be conclusive when applied to the first and greatest article of religion, I mean the existence of God, sure it will be so too with respect to the best and fittest way of worshipping him. But what is still more, God himself prescribed this way of worship to the Jews, as in the cases of murder, when the person who committed it was unknown; of suspicion of adultery; and when the first fruits were presented: his son our Saviour honoured this way of worship with his presence, for the worship of the synagogues was by a form of prayer; he sanctified it by his practice, for in his agony in the garden he rose up, awakened and rebuked the disciples, returned to the same place, repeated the same form of words three times over, and before he expired upon the cross he offered up his devotions in the words of the XXII. psalm; he authorized it by his command, for our directory for prayer informs us that our Lord's prayer is not only a pattern for prayer, but itself a most comprehensive prayer; so that if the command of God himself, the example, practice, and command of his Son, be sufficient to point out in what way he would be worshipped, a form of prayer is pointed out for that purpose; whereas it cannot be proved that ever God commanded extemporary public prayer; that ever his Son attended

attended worship performed in that way; that ever he practised it, or ever commanded it; nay I am not certain that there is one example of extemporary public prayer in all the Bible, at least I am sure there is not an instance that will correspond with our situation, or authorise us in the use of it, when so many and so great inconveniences do attend it.

We complain, and very justly too, that the Popish clergy are too assuming, and claim a superiority over the laity, inconsistent with the natural rights of mankind, and the relation of brethren formed by the covenant of grace; pardon me, gentlemen, if I say that you claim a very extraordinary superiority over the laity in the case before us; every one of you claims an exclusive privilege of manufacturing our public prayers, and assumes a right of making us say to the Deity whatever he thinks fit. In the most momentous affair in which we can be concerned upon earth we must depend entirely upon the discretion, honesty and ability of every private parson, and take the words and matter of our addresses to our God and Maker, such as he is pleased to give, without ever seeing, examining, or judging for ourselves. This is really treating us as if we were children or fools: we allow that you have a right to offer our prayers, and as it is not fit that we should all speak, the minister may be called the mouth of the congregation; but the mouth of the congregation should speak

speak the mind of the congregation. In our congregations the mouth runs before the mind, and speaks without giving us any opportunity of thinking what we ought to speak, and often says things that we should certainly reject, and sometimes offers petitions that we should absolutely abhor, had we time calmly to examine them. Our mouth leads us into the gross blunder of presenting our addresses to the Deity first, and next judging whether they be proper addresses after they are offered, when we cannot mend what is wrong, or alter what is improper; we absurdly begin where we should end, for, in the natural order of things, the congregation should first be satisfied what prayers are proper to be offered, and then the minister should offer them in their name; just as a prudent man will think before he speaks: but in our *admirable* plan of worship the congregation speaks by its mouth, before it has considered what it is to say; that is, the parson offers up the petition, and the people may judge of its propriety after it is offered, if they please.

The absurdity here is so glaring that it is astonishing that it escapes the observation of the laity, and it would not escape them in any other instance. Should the ablest member of the house of commons propose to offer an address to his Majesty, in the name of the house, without communicating it to the members, the impropriety would be immediately perceived. When the estates or counties de-
sign

sign to address their sovereign, offer your service, and tell them, "Pray, gentlemen, give yourselves no trouble about the matter, we and our brethren will each of us address the King in our own way; trust the whole affair to us; every individual of the cloth is more than sufficient for the undertaking; it is your business to approve of whatever we are pleased to say for you; or at least you may consider how you like the address after it has been offered." Take this advice, and try if the laity will be as complaisant with respect to the honour of their prince, and the concerns of their bodies, as they are with respect to the honour of their God and the interests of their souls; yet one would be tempted to think, if the common consent of this nation were not against the opinion, that the laity are as much interested in an address to the Deity, as in one to the King; and that they would be at least as loath to trust the first as the last to the discretion, ability, or honesty of every man who chanced to put on a black coat, or wear a starched band. But the grossest absurdity will be swallowed down when it is in fashion; and, I think, there can hardly be a grosser one than that a gentleman should mount the pulpit, of whose principles or discretion we have no knowledge at all, and that this man should have a right to dictate the prayers of a whole congregation. If we will believe the author of the Characteristics,

tics*, who seems to speak from experience; there are among you many whose principles are very dangerous, and very inconsistent with the religion of Jesus; yet these men not only lead, but even compose, the devotions of the people, and make us poor lay-men address our Maker upon any principles that they please.

I have come from my house a sound orthodox Christian, and have hardly taken my seat in the church, when I have found myself praying, or at least one was praying in my name, as a rank Socinian. I have been made an Arian as to my prayers very often; and, in short, there has hardly any whimsical opinion been broached among the clergy for these forty years, that I have not some time or other found mixed with my public prayers, though, for my part, I am a plain old fashioned man, and content myself with the apostles creed. Sometimes, indeed, for my heart, I could not have told upon what particular principles my prayers were offered, they were so *excellently well contrived, and so free from all narrow notions*, that they would have served a Jewish synagogue, a Mahometan mosque, or a congregation of Persian magi, as well or better than a Christian assembly. If the minister that officiates be a sceptic, I am made to pray like a sceptic; if an enthusiast, he addresses God in my name according to his own en-

* Ecclesiastical Characteristics, published at Glasgow, 1756.

thusiastical notions; when he chances to be a factious firebrand, or a keen party-man, though I be a very peaceable tradesman, my prayers breathe faction, my devotions in publick are flaming with party heat, and tinged with the fury of his faction. It is well known, that when any disputes happen, and differences arise among the clergy in their synods or assemblies, both sides appeal to heaven in their publick prayers, and force the laity to appeal with them; we are not supposed to have any right to judge for ourselves in these cases, and what is even worse, by an unlucky change of ministers, or by stepping into another church, I have often been made to appeal to heaven as an advocate for both sides of the question, and pray for and against each of the parties in one day: for though our churches have the appearance of the same worship, yet, in fact, their worship is as different as the tempers, principles, and parties of the parsons who manufacture it, and this leads the laity into the dangerous blunder of offering contradictory petitions, and praying at different times, upon principles as opposite to one another as light is to darkness. It is an usual thing amongst us to pray for and against presentations; in one week I have thanked God for his decrees of election and reprobation in the forenoon, and in the afternoon offered my humble thanks that all men have equal access to salvation, by faith and virtue. In a word, there is no party, nor

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different principle, among our clergy with respect to which I have not been made to play fast and loose with the Deity, to ask what I did not want, and to pray against what I most earnestly wished for. This we call worshipping God! but did we deal so with our fellow men, they would call it mockery, and take it as a gross affront: I cannot help thinking, gentlemen, that this will appear even to yourselves hard treatment of the laity, and that you will acknowledge, that their judgment ought not to be so entirely made a property of, as to oblige them to have their publick worship offered upon what principles the parson pleases to espouse; or upon opposite principles, as the minister for the time is of this or the other party. One of your cloth complains that we betray * a visible impatience till prayer be over: Is it any wonder if we do? for as it is managed at present, prayer is to us a very dangerous part of worship; for, as that judicious gentleman observes, *A great deal more, a vast deal more, depends upon our performance of this duty with judgment and propriety, than most people seem to be aware of.* They who are aware of this cannot help being impatient and uneasy, when a duty of such vast importance is trusted to every individual of the clergy, and they who seldom think of its nature or importance will always esteem it a dry and lifeless part of our service.

* Mr. Fordyce's education by publick institutions.

CLERICAL POWER.

I am apt to think, that it is sometimes happy for our laity that they only hear prayer as they do sermons, and cannot, I believe, as it is at present performed, or at least I am sure do not join in it, for though it be criminal not to worship God in publick, yet it seems to be as great if not a greater crime to offer an irrational worship, to insult him with contradictory petitions with ministers of opposite parties, and to have our devotions tinctured with the spirit of faction, the wild dreams of enthusiasts, the dangerous notions of sceptics, and the absurd follies of men whose heads are filled with vapours and whims. Though these should sometimes be mixed with your discourses, the hardship and danger would not be half so great. If they did not instruct, they might amuse; and we needed not embrace your notions unless we pleased; our own reason might resist, or some approved printed sermons might expel the poison. But when they are wrought into our publick prayers, there remains no remedy; we must take these as you are pleased to give them, or go away without publick worship.

The popish clergy indeed put a great hardship upon the laity, by offering their prayers in an unknown tongue; but though the hardship be great, it admits of some remedies; they may have their prayers translated into their

their respective languages, they may have them explained by those that understand the language, and constant use of the same forms may in time enable them to annex proper ideas to the words; but the hardship put upon us admits of no remedy; we must offer what prayers every clergyman pleases, we must understand them the best way we can, we must pick up the words as we can catch them, according to the strength of your voices, the distinctness of your pronunciation, and the largeness of the church: the fall of a bible, the opening of a seat, or a cough in any corner of the church, will lose us half a sentence, and yet if we would pray with the understanding, we must collect the several parts of the sentence, supply the words that are lost, compare it with what went before, examine, approve, and offer it; and this must be all done in a breath. I question whether the parson could perform this task himself, and I am convinced that it is impossible for the slow and ignorant part of the audience; especially as some of you speak so fast, that we cannot keep pace with you barely in hearing what you say; others deliver so slowly, that our memories cannot serve us to collect the several parts of the sentence; some are so fond of new and learned words, that one half of the congregation cannot know their meaning, and many of you have such a perplexed, intricate way of expressing yourselves, that we find it impossible to discover the import of your petitions; and perhaps would find this a
difficult

difficult task, though we had an opportunity to consider them at leisure in our closets.

So that, putting all these difficulties together, I imagine that it will appear that the laity of the kirk of Scotland lie under greater hardships with respect to publick worship than the laity of any church upon earth; and this hardship is made still more galling to those who have sense enough to feel it by the pompous harangues that we are frequently entertained with upon the privileges that we possess above other Christians, the religious liberty we enjoy, and the singular purity of our worship. Sure, gentlemen, you must mean *yourselves* when you ascribe these great blessings to our church, or you insult us in the most cruel manner. If you mean that you enjoy great privileges, and a most extensive liberty, it is very true, for you pray what you please, you sing what you please, you teach what you please, and our whole publick worship is so much of your own manufacturing, that there can hardly be found room for a verse or two of scripture, and these you choose as you please. In a word, every parish minister is a little pope, subject to none but a general council, and, like the great pope, not subject to that but when he pleases: for it seems to be a point as much disputed in the presbyterian church, whether a minister is obliged to submit to the sentence of a general assembly, as it is in the popish whether his holiness ought to yield obedience to a general

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council.

council. So that it must be acknowledged, that you enjoy very great privileges, and a most extensive liberty. But, pray, what privileges do we enjoy when one man's judgment prescribes to a whole parish? when we must pray for or against whatever party the parson pleases? offer our devotions according to the religious or political principles that the minister for the time chooses to embrace? shift sides as your humours change, and address our God as Arians, Socinians, or scepticks, as the gentleman in the pulpit is inclined?—Sure, if our civil liberty were not something more substantial, we would be the greatest slaves in Europe!—Again, what purity can there possibly be in our worship when the passions, prejudices, and whimsical opinions of every minister may and do mix with it? I have always been at a loss to determine whether your confidence in entertaining us with such harangues, and your power of face in keeping your countenances, and stifling the laugh, or our stupidity in not perceiving the gross affront, and patience in not resenting it, were most to be admired. I cannot imagine that you are so weak as to think with the bulk of our people, that our worship must of consequence be pure if it be different from the practice of the church of Rome; and that we can only err upon the side of superstition. If this be your opinion, it resembles the conduct of some Germans of whom I have read; who, for fear of the
Roman

Roman army, ran into a river and were drowned. Just so the greatest part of our people, for I believe better things of you, conclude that our worship must be pure if we do not worship images, pray to saints, or adore the Virgin Mary; though it be mixed with the whimsical notions, enthusiastic opinions, and silly nostrums, of every quack doctor in divinity. It would be happy if you would content yourselves with insulting the people only with such harangues; but you often make them insult their God, or at least you do it in their names, by thanking him for establishing a pure worship which he did not establish; a worship which cannot possibly be pure; and which, even in your own opinion, is not pure; for if the moderate party consists of such ministers as the author of the *Characteristicks* *, who is said to be one of your order, has represented them to the world, God have mercy upon the souls committed to their care! and may the Almighty pity and relieve the congregations whose devotions they compose, dictate, and offer. Yet in all probability, if the moderate men were to write *characteristicks*, they would give us as forbidding a picture of the party that our author is pleased to call orthodox. What then must become of us poor lay-men, whose souls are bandied about between the factions, and our prayers offered sometimes

* *Ecclesiastical Characteristicks* published at Glasgow 1756.

upon the principles of the one, and sometimes upon the principles of the other? would it not be happy for us that we had some pious, primitive form of prayer that would secure the purity and reasonableness of our prayers, let the minister's private opinions be what they would? As things are at present, it is impossible that our service can either be reasonable, perfect, or pure, unless we can suppose that our church has a privilege which no church upon earth ever had or ever claimed: I mean, that no weak or whimsical minister, no factious firebrand, no sceptic or enthusiast, can mount our pulpits; or that, after men of these characters get into them, they will pray better than they are able, upon principles that they do not believe; or with a calmness which they do not possess. Now supposing that there are only an hundred* of our ministers, of some or other of the above characters, and that one with another each of them has 500 souls under his charge, there will be 50,000 persons in Scotland who never worship God in public in the way of his own appointment, and whose public worship must be dangerous to themselves, and unacceptable to the Deity. Where must the blood of these poor people fall, but upon the rulers of our church,

* This is not an unreasonable calculation in these latter ages, considering that there was one of twelve who proved a traitor, even when our Lord was visibly present with his church.

who,

who, though they have found by fatal experience that all the subscriptions in the world will not hinder men of pernicious principles from creeping into the church, yet will not take the only effectual method to prevent them from doing mischief there?

INCONVENIENCIES OF EXTEMPORARY
WORSHIP.

But, besides the injustice of assuming to yourselves a right to dictate to us what prayers you please, besides the absurdity of making us offer contradictory petitions, and leaving our public worship exposed to the whims and follies of the sceptic and enthusiast, there are many other inconveniencies that attend our present method.

I. It is a question, whether the laity can join at all in our public prayers; for we must either suppose that they go along with the minister, offering every word as he utters it, or wait until he has finished the sentence, and then examine it, and give their assent. If the first be their method, it is evident that they place an absurd and dangerous confidence in the honesty and ability of the parson, and embrace in their prayers all the whimsical notions and pernicious principles that he may chance to mix with them; and further, that many of them will, like parrots, talk what they do not understand, since many words will occur, whose meaning and importance

they are not able all at once to conceive. At least I find it so with myself. Perhaps our people may be inspired with more than ordinary penetration in the time of prayer, but at other times I find it difficult enough to make many of them comprehend an ordinary message, delivered in the plainest words that I can possibly find; and, after repeating it over and over again, have the mortification to find that they misunderstand me, though the whole message does not exceed two sentences. That these men should understand all the expressions in an extemporary prayer, and with their understandings and judgments keep pace with the minister for half an hour or twenty minutes, to me appears impossible, and I believe will appear, even to you, very miraculous. But suppose that our people wait till the minister has finished the sentence, and then compare the several parts, examine the whole, and give their assent, God knows how unfit many of them are for this task; but let them be ever so fit, if a word be lost, if one occurs whose meaning they do not understand, or if the arrangement of the words be perplexed, it is evident that they cannot give a rational assent: and if they take time to examine what may be suspicious, to supply what is lost, or to unravel what is perplexed, let them be as quick as they will, the subsequent sentence will be lost. I do not indeed suppose that the bulk of our congregations ever dreamt of these difficulties,

difficulties, because they give themselves no trouble about understanding, examining, or assenting; but content themselves with being humble hearers, and perhaps in all their lives never once gave a sincere and rational amen to public prayers; though hearing another pray, and joining in prayer, be very different things.

II. Another inconvenience that attends our way of worship is, that young gentlemen just come from the universities, full fraught with philosophy, and fond of shewing their learning, very injudiciously vent their notions in our public prayers. A young spruce gentleman the other Sunday converted us in an instant from plain country people into profound philosophers, and these too of the dogmatical kind; for we told God Almighty many things concerning his own works which the learned gentleman, it seems, thought he did not know before; many things that we neither understood, nor believed: we travelled so high that our heads began to turn; and, after all, lost our gentleman, for fifteen minutes, among things that he called vortices, and began indeed to suspect that he was swallowed up by them, or had gone where Milton tells us all vain and empty things go,

——Up whirled aloft,
Fly o'er the backside of the world far off,
Into a limbo large and broad, since call'd
The paradise of fools*.

* Milt. Parad. Lost, book iii. p. 495.

Whether he visited that place or not, we cannot tell, but we found him at last upon earth chasing a mole. Had he been pleased to tell us these things, stript of their philosophic garb, in a sermon, some of them might have been entertaining, some of them useful, and most of them tolerable; but to make us inform the Deity of things that we neither knew nor believed, and, as it were, instruct our Maker in the nature, beauty, and order, of his own works, I humbly think was imprudent and presumptuous. However he made a shift, by new-coined words and terms of art, to be far above the reach of our understandings; and to pray with him we must have read Euclid, studied Newton's works more than our bibles, and brought half a dozen of dictionaries to church with us to help us to the meaning of his words. The gentleman however obtained his end; the people stared, and when they came out concluded that he was admirably learned, and that none was so fit to be their minister. Upon this whim they vigorously oppose the settlement of a pious and prudent gentleman, presented to the charge by the patron, and are most piously supported in their wise opposition by a set of the clergy, I suppose, for conscience sake. But I beg pardon; digression is a fault. My business is only with our public worship; and I flatter myself that you will own that upon that Sunday it was but poorly performed; yet such farces as these we are often forced to bear with; and instead of

of the humble expressions of penitents, the concise petitions of poor mortals, and the grateful thanksgivings of rational creatures, to their merciful God, our prayers frequently consist of the foolish ostentation of learning, and the harsh jargon of hard words.

III. Neither does our worship suffer more by the ostentatious folly and pedantic humour of our young *dominies*, than by the natural and necessary decays of the invention, memory, and judgment, of our aged ministers; for as the clergy are foolish enough to vie in the expences of dress, table, and equipage, with the landed gentlemen, most of them are unable, and all of them are unwilling, to call an assistant, as long as they are able to creep up to a pulpit, and prattle out something like a prayer; so that you will frequently find a man inventing and dictating the devotions of a congregation, who is superannuated to all the other affairs of life. This man, it seems, has a right to make us address our Maker in what manner, and with what words, he thinks proper; though in common conversation we cannot help perceiving that his memory has lost its strength, that his understanding is decayed, and all the powers of his mind are sadly declined. It would perhaps be cruel to give instances of the blunders, blasphemy, and nonsense, that have been mixed with our prayers by this misfortune, though many instances might be produced; but it is, I humbly think, more cruel, and highly unreasonable, to put the

the aged ministers under the necessity of exposing their weakness, and dishonouring the service of their Maker, and the laity under the hardship either of offering nonsense or blasphemy, instead of pious, ardent, and expressive prayers, or of reducing their minister to want and beggary in his old age, by forcing him to call an assistant, whether he can maintain him or not; especially as all danger might be prevented, and all deficiencies supplied, by composing and establishing a pious form of prayer; for he might read a prayer very devoutly and distinctly, when he cannot invent readily, or dictate an extemporary prayer to the congregation with propriety and judgment; or if he chanced to blunder, or pronounce indistinctly, having the form before us we could easily supply the defects; we could much better put up with trifling in his sermons, and patiently hear him prattle about his subject and about it, because we could supply our loss, in some measure, by reading some of the best sermons ourselves, or to our families; but public prayer is a matter of that importance, that there is no possibility of supplying it by our own industry; no rectifying mistakes after the prayer is offered; and no possibility of preventing very gross and dangerous blunders, while we perform this part of our worship after the present method: for though our aged ministers should retain all the powers of their minds to the last, which is not the case with one in an hundred; though

though they should be able to invent extemporary petitions with propriety, yet, as the organs of the body decay, it is impossible that they can express them with that strength of voice and distinctness of pronunciation, which are necessary to us, before we can give a rational assent, if we can at all give a rational assent to prayers that we have never examined, no, nor yet the minister himself. The weak voice, the trembling body, the want of teeth, and other infirmities incident to old age, do often render the pronunciation so indistinct, that in our present way of worship one half of the congregation is at as great a loss as if the gentleman prayed in an unknown tongue; or at most they can only pick up a word here and there without any connexion. Let us suppose that among more than a thousand ministers there are only eighty whose understandings or bodily organs are thus decayed, and that one with another each of them has 500 souls under his charge; it would be a misfortune to those who are under the care of the first if they did join in the public worship as it is performed amongst them, and they who are under the care of the last cannot possibly do it; so that there must be in Scotland at least 40,000 persons who are debarred from the most essential part of public worship by the old age of our ministers, joined with the absurdity of our present plan; to which, if we add the 50,000 I mentioned before, there will be ninety thousand

thousand persons in this nation who cannot worship God at all in public, or worship him in a way unworthy of him, and dangerous to themselves, whose blood must be crying to heaven against the rulers of our church. For whether the above calculations be allowed to be just or not, there must certainly be a very considerable number of our brethren in this distressed situation; unless we suppose, contrary to known matter of fact, that the ministers of our church are not subject to the same infirmities of body and mind that other men are subjected to; and that they are secured, by some secret infallibility, from embracing enthusiastical or sceptical opinions.

IV. But further: our worship, as it is performed at present, is not only corrupted by the contrary petitions of contending parties; not only tinged with the heats and animosities that arise in synods and assemblies; not only mixed with the whimsical opinions and pernicious principles of libertines and enthusiasts that climb up into our pulpits; not only rendered obscure and contemptible by the pedantry and affected learning of the younger, and the weaknesses of mind and body of our older ministers; but frequently interlaid with ill-timed compliments to the great, or the minister's favourites, and the grossest abuses of those who have the misfortune to be out of favour. I could produce numerous instances of both, and, were it not an invidious task, point out the persons, places,

places, and times. Upon the marriage of a certain noble peer in this nation, the parson carried his compliments so far in the public prayers, that he exceeded all bounds of decency, and made his female hearers blush; and I would blush to repeat to the rulers of our church in a letter the expressions that he made use of to the God of heaven and earth in the face of a congregation: so extravagant and ill chosen were his words, that the lady was forced to direct the clergyman and entreat him to forbear his rude petitions. A minister, even in one of our royal burghs, observing a young gentleman, son to one of the magistrates, in church, after a journey to London, made all the congregation thank God that he had brought back their friends from foreign lands. Most men, I presume, will remember how grossly the royal commander of his Majesty's forces during the last war was abused by having his praises wrought into our public prayers by rough and unskilful hands. Some allowances, I own, are to be made for the clergy in this instance; the augmentation scheme was then in agitation, and the weaker part of them foolishly thought that this would pave the way for it.

V. On the other hand, he must be a great stranger in our congregations, or very heedless when he comes there, who has not observed that sometimes a well-meant zeal, and sometimes too warm an attachment to party opinions with respect to religious subjects,

jects, and private resentments too, have taught ministers of keen passions to use several expressions, not only inconsistent with the charity of Christians, but even with the humanity of men. *Vex them in thy wrath and plead with them in thy displeasure through all eternity*, was the unchristian petition of Mr. ——— with respect to papists: *Pour down the vials of thy wrath upon them, and burn their flesh with fire*, was Mr. C—'s ungenerous wish. Nothing but heat of zeal and hurry of passion could have dictated these petitions, and I am far from thinking that many of our ministers suffer themselves to be driven to so great lengths. But all of them are subject to passions, and what is left to the discretion of the minister, is left also to the indiscretion and passions of the man; and we frequently find the two last where the first was designed to take place. Many instances could be given of the ill-timed flattery of friends and unchristian expressions with respect to enemies, that have been vented in our publick prayers; but I am tender of the reputation of the clergy, and do not choose to expose their errors farther than is absolutely necessary to shew the danger and absurdity of our present way of worship, and to persuade them to recover and secure its purity and decency; and therefore, I humbly entreat you to consider whether the ill-timed, ill-chosen compliments of sycophants upon the one hand, and the unchristian expressions of keen zealots

zealots upon the other, do not render our publick worship contemptible and dangerous; and whether there be any thing so likely to prevent them from indulging their humours, to the dishonour of God, and disgrace of religion, as some well chosen pious public form of prayer.

VI. After flattery we may mention politics, in which our ministers will be dabbling, in spite of grace, nature, and common sense, as another very fruitful source of blunders in our publick worship: few of them have genius, fewer still have sufficient intelligence, and all of them are at too great a distance from the seat of government, to comprehend the secret intrigues of courts, or to perceive, in spite of the varnish by which they are disguised, the real views of parties; yet all of them will be meddling, and in every dispute our prayers must take a side, and the poor lay-men must address their Maker, sometimes upon the faith of a foolish rumour, and often upon the credit of a common newspaper: to say nothing of the times very wittily, but very truly, described by Butler in his Hudibras,

When gospel trumpeter surrounded
With long-ear'd rout, to battle sounded,
And pulpit drum ecclesiastick
Was beat by fist instead of a stick;

not, I say, to mention those days, whose history will be an eternal disgrace to our religion, and would furnish as many instances of
nonsense

nonsense and blasphemy, vented in our publick prayers, as would be sufficient to fill up a large volume, even in latter days politicks have introduced very gross absurdities into our public service. I am not yet an old man, and I remember to have been made to pray that God would pull down *the bloody house of Austria*: during the last war, I earnestly begged that he would build it up; now I begin to give broad hints, that I would have it pulled down again, and am expecting every Sunday to be made to desire it in a formal manner. The interests and leagues of the state of Europe shift so frequently, that we are often flung out in our prayers, and pray for our enemies as if they were our friends, and against our friends as if they were enemies. Would our ministers be contented to make us pray in general for our friends, and against the devices of our enemies, we should never be wrong; but they choose to mention whom they mean, lest omniscient wisdom should mistake, or, at least, that their people may know that they are great politicians, and very zealous for the publick good. Many a time have I thanked God for giving us glorious victories, when we have been shamefully beat; for inspiring courage into our troops when they have run away; for success granted to our arms, in battles that were never fought; and for deliverances from plots that were never formed. Our publick worship, in the present way, has always been, and will always

ways be tinged with the spirit of party, and made the property of faction, in church and state. When the famous Cambuslang conversion was going on, I shall never forget it, one Sunday morning I was made to thank God for the manifestations of his power in that conversion, and entreat him to continue the great work that he had begun, in the afternoon, by an unluckly change of ministers, I was made to pray, that God would put a stop to the delusions of the devil, by which the ignorant and simple were deceived, and give us grace to resist that spirit of enthusiasm that had gone out into our land: thus what I ascribed to God in the morning, I ascribed to the devil in the afternoon, and what I had requested God to promote, I requested him too, to give me grace to resist. I prayed long and earnestly with Walpole's enemies, before their intrigues and my prayers could pull him down, and when he fell, I was made to thank God for the great deliverance; though it was soon discovered, that it was nothing more but a struggle for power between parties, and a matter of no moment to me or my country which of the parties was in or out; however, all ranks contributed something to raise the clamour; the mob made bonfires, the magistrates rung bells, the ministers gave their prayers, and the mountain brought forth a mouse.

VII. Nay, I have known the private piques and little quarrels between the parson and his

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neighbours

neighbours introduced into our publick worship, and made a part of our prayers; even when the parson was the first aggressor, he had the assurance to complain to God, as he called it, and what was still more unreasonable, made his parishioners complain with him, or at least, he complained in their names, though most of them were very sensible that he himself had done the injustice; how his complaints were received in heaven I cannot tell, but I know that they had their effects upon earth, for his antagonist, unable to bear the staring of the congregation every Lord's-day, was forced to sit down under the injustice. It is hard to determine in this respect, whether you have the meanest opinion of your God or your hearers, for it seems you think that both are obliged to shift sides as you are pleased to direct them, and, right or wrong, be still of the party which the parson for the time thinks fit to embrace. That you should treat the laity with so great contempt in this case is not so surprizing, as you may be convinced, from long experience, that they will swallow down the grossest absurdities in their publick prayers, and trust the propriety of their worship upon Sunday to the discretion and ability of a man, whose folly and weakness perhaps they laugh at all the week. But I own it is amazing that you can use such freedom with the Deity, to desire him to do and undo as the fancy strikes you, or your designs chance to alter.

VIII. Our

VIII. Our prayers are for the most part too historical, and seem rather designed to instruct the congregation, than to confess their sins; express their wants, or offer their grateful thanksgivings. I do not at all suppose that you are ignorant, as our people seem to be, of the difference between preaching and praying; or that you are not sensible that a very good sermon will make but a very bad prayer; but I cannot help thinking that you comply too far with the popular taste in this respect, and strive to please by giving our publick prayers as much the air and manner of a sermon as possible; or knowing that many of your people judge of the propriety and excellency of a prayer by its length, to come up to the common standard you are forced to fill up a gap with what materials come first to hand; and this I am more apt to believe to be the case, because we sometimes find half a dozen of sentences from scripture poured into our prayers all at once, without the least connexion among themselves, or the least relation to what went before, or follows after; and frequently too without the least affinity to any of the parts of prayer. What Mr. Fordyce means by that certain * *happy irregularity* in our publick prayers, which he is pleased to recommend, I profess I know not; but I know very well that there is a certain unhappy irregularity in most of ours, that ren-

* Edification, &c. page 15.

ders them very improper for publick worship. The several parts of prayer are most absurdly confounded, though they require very different dispositions of heart; confession is jumbled with thanksgiving; petition is mixed with narration; and sometimes we have all the parts of prayer in one single sentence. By these means the mind is held in suspense, and cannot settle to that humility, conviction, and sorrow, that ought to attend confession; nor is it raised to that warm gratitude, and ardent love, that ought to enliven our thanksgivings; neither is it filled with that sense of dependance, nor formed to that serious earnestness and lively faith, with which our petitions ought to be sent forth.

IX. Instead of these, amused with the novelty of expression, and distracted with the quick and irregular successions of the several parts of prayer, it fluctuates between these sensations, and feels not much of either. When all the powers of the soul should be employed in their proper places, and making their greatest efforts to offer a spiritual worship to the Father of spirits, our curiosity is only awake, and we are listening to a prayer no otherways than we do to a sermon. I would beg leave further to observe, that our extemporary worship in the church produces very bad effects with respect to our worship in our families; for as praying to God extempore is the prevailing fashion, and as our people are taught to despise worship offered by a form,

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o those of them who want memory, learning, and invention, to express themselves extempore with propriety, and have modesty to be ashamed of indecent expressions, and reflection to think of the danger of unreasonable and unchristian petitions, never pray with their families at all. On the other hand, when ignorance and self-sufficiency meet in the master of a family, their worship of consequence is a miserable mixture of nonsense, error, and blasphemy. The most ignorant are always the most presuming; and the less sense that a man has of the nature and importance of prayer, the more readily will he venture upon extemporary worship. In fact it is true that many of our people who can hardly repeat their creed, and know very little more of their religion than a few hard words that they have gleaned out of our catechisms, imitate our parsons in praying extempore; and approach their Maker with as great familiarity as they would do their neighbour, and with much less respect and reverence than they dare treat their laird. Good God! what pitiful scenes have I seen of this kind! What rude and shocking expressions, what blasphemous petitions have I heard! How often have I trembled when the ignorant and proud enthusiast kneeled down with his family to his extemporary worship! How often have I shuddered at the whimsical notions that he wrought into our prayers, the insolent and unchristian expressions which he used, and the nonsense that he offered in our name. How

often has my heart bled in secret for the sad situation of many miserable families, who, by our unhappy attachment to extemporary prayer, either want family worship altogether, or offer their worship in such a manner as dishonours God, disgraces religion, and is very dangerous to themselves! But I would very far exceed the bounds of a letter, and I am afraid weary out your patience, if I should endeavour to lay before you all the inconveniences that attend our present way of worship; and, I flatter myself, if you will add to these already taken notice of the blunders of ignorance, the flights of vanity, the needless silly repetitions, the unguarded expressions, and the childish thoughts that are mixed with our prayers, and must be mixed with them, unless you can suppose that all our ministers are men of the greatest abilities, elocution, and prudence, you will see, that our present way of worship is defective, unreasonable, and dangerous, and that the hardships that the laity labour under, and the danger to which they are exposed, can only be removed by some devout and approved form of prayer.

CAVILS REFUTED.

To support the present absurd practice, to make the laity sit quietly down with the injustice done them, and to blind their eyes that they may not perceive the disadvantages that they labour under, and the danger to which they

they are exposed, it has been said that a form of prayer will limit the inspiration of the Spirit; that it deadens the devotion of the people; that all the wants of a Christian congregation cannot be expressed by a form: and some have been so foolish as to say that it is unlawful to worship by a form of prayer. Will you pardon my presumption, and hear me with patience, if I humbly offer my thoughts upon these heads: I hope you will. As to the first, I might boldly appeal to your own consciences, and ask you, *In the name of God, Do you believe that you are inspired? Have you indeed so mean an opinion of the understanding and judgment of the laity, as to imagine that any of them, who think at all, can ever be brought to believe that the prayers we commonly hear are dictated by the Holy Ghost? Or have you so little regard to the honour of God, and the interests of religion, as to ascribe your extemporary effusions to the Holy Spirit?* No; I am persuaded that none but the rankest enthusiasts will ever urge this argument against a form of prayer; and I will beg leave to ask such, are the words, or the matter of your prayers, or both, inspired? That the words are not inspired is evident from the difficulty that you frequently have to find proper words; from the improper and sometimes indecent expressions that fall from you; from the ill-timed pauses that you are forced to make, and that most useful supplement of coughing, groaning, and spitting,

that must come in to your assistance. But supposing that you were indeed inspired with words, it would be of small importance to yourselves or to us, unless the matter of your prayers be inspired too; and if the matter of them be inspired, your prayers are of equal authority with the scriptures themselves, and should be entered into the canon. I know not how to excuse the negligence of the people of this nation in suffering so much sound doctrine to be lost; it might have cleared up some difficult passages in scripture, and decided several important disputes. I know not what to say for this piece of negligence, unless our people think that all things necessary for Christians to know, to believe, and to practise, are revealed in the holy scriptures; and that they may be taught by them what to ask in prayer, and how to regulate their lives; and if this be true, your inspiration is a very great gift bestowed for very poor purposes, only to save you the pains of searching the scriptures, and the trouble of composing a form of prayer by the instructions and examples contained in them. The heathen poets themselves had a greater reverence for the Deity than this, for it was a maxim among them

Nec deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit—————•

* Hor. Art. Poet. Never let a god be introduced, unless there happens to be some difficulty worthy of such an agent.

I submit

I submit whether you do not transgress against this rule, by introducing the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, if the scriptures be sufficient to direct us what to ask in prayer; and if they be not sufficient for this, the revelation of the will of God for our salvation is defective in a very important point, and neither the prophets nor the apostles, no, nor our Saviour himself, though he enterprized it, have taught us how to pray. But, supposing that it were necessary that the words and matter of our prayers should be inspired by the Holy Ghost, why might not a number of pious and learned divines met, together with such an interesting and great design as that of composing a form of prayer for a whole church, have as much reason to expect, and be as likely to receive, the assistance of the Holy Spirit as a private clergyman inventing the transient prayer of a particular congregation? But this supposed inspiration, in our extemporary way, will involve us in very great, nay insuperable difficulties, for we shall be as much puzzled where to find our miraculous inspiration, as the papists are where to fix their wonderful infallibility. For if we suppose that this inspiration is confined to any one of the several sects that use extemporary prayer, we prescribe to the Holy Spirit, and limit him with a witness, and shall be sadly perplexed to determine to which particular party this wonderful privilege is given. If we suppose that this privilege is common to
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the ministers of all the sects, then we must conclude that the Holy Ghost inspires opposite petitions to men of opposite principles, and directs one sect to pray against another. For instance, if he inspires the burghers* to pray against the principles of their seceding brethren the antiburghers, and to cut them off from their communion by excommunication, we cannot suppose that he inspires the antiburghers to return the compliment; and if he inspires the ministers of these sects to pray against the principles of the church established by law, he does not direct the ministers of the established church in their public prayers to call the secession a dangerous schism. That the ministers of the several sects do pray for the success of their several parties, and that God would hinder the spreading of the principles of the other sects, is evident to all the world. Now unless we would be guilty of the boldest blasphemy, and say that the Holy Ghost chimes in with the principles of the parson whatever they be as, the people are forced to do, we must conclude that this inspiration is not granted but to one of the sects, and I shall only request each of them to use a form of prayer, until they shall be able to prove that this gift of inspiration belongs to them. And that the established church with

* Burgher and Antiburgher are the names of the two parties among the Scotch seceders, taken from the cause of their quarrel, an oath imposed in some of the royal boroughs in Scotland upon those they admit into the corporation.

which

which I have to do, may be more willing to hear and grant my request, I will produce some strong presumptions that it does not belong to them: indeed the instances that I have given above are more than sufficient for this purpose; but I shall further add, first, that if the confession of faith be true, none of our ministers are inspired in their prayers; for there all mankind are divided into two classes, the elect and the reprobates; yet it is evident, beyond all possibility of dispute, that the elect pray as if it were possible that they may be damned; and the reprobates as if it were possible that they may be saved; and yet it is impossible that the Holy Spirit inspires either of them with these prayers, unless we be so impious as to imagine that he directs them to pray upon false principles, and inspires them to pray for or against what he knows can never happen; and though some of you urge this argument of inspiration against your adversaries, yet our church has in fact very fairly disclaimed it, by publishing and authorizing a directory for public prayer, unless we would suppose them so presumptuous as to direct the Holy Spirit how to pray. In truth our presbyterian inspiration is as mysterious and as useless a gift as the popish infallibility. The popish church has an infallibility lodged somewhere, but she knows not where to find it in time of need; we presbyterians have an inspiration among us, but we know not to which of all the sects it belongs. The infallible church

church is filled with disputes which her infallibility cannot determine, and the inspired church has nonsense, contradiction, and whimsical opinions, vented in her publick prayers, which her inspiration does not prevent; the infallible church has the most unreasonable and absurd creed of any church upon earth; and the inspired church has, and will, have while she adheres to her present plan, a very defective, unreasonable, and dangerous kind of public worship; so fully and justly does the providence of heaven confute the vain pretensions of presumptuous men.

But it may be said, and it has been said, that this gift of inspiration is not universal to all our ministers, nor uniform and constant to any of them; but granted now and then by fits and starts; something, I suppose, like the quakers spirit. I cannot help thinking, if this be the case, that the quakers proceed more judiciously than we; they patiently wait in silence till they feel, or imagine they feel, the influences of the Spirit; but if he does not come, we venture to do without him: they humbly submit it to his will to inspire whom he pleaseth; but we confine him to the minister: they stop short when his influence ceases, but we run our glasses, let his influences cease when they will. I would therefore humbly propose, either that like quakers we should wait the Spirit, and permit any one of the congregation who chanced to be inspired to dictate our devotions; or that a form of prayer be composed

posed and authorized only to be used when the minister feels no inspiration. Let him have full liberty to depart from the form when he feels upon his mind the miraculous influences of the Holy Spirit suggesting the matter of his prayers. By this method we shall gain two very considerable advantages; first, we shall always worship, either by inspiration or by an approved form, and be certain, unless the parson deceives us, that the ignorance, affectation, ill-timed zeal, pride, or passions, of the man himself, cannot tincture our public worship, or mix themselves with our prayers: and next we shall discover when our parsons are inspired; for, as things are managed at present, this miracle is as much lost in our Presbyterian church as the famous miracle of transubstantiation is among the Papists. In both churches there is a wonderful manifestation of Almighty power, yet no one is able to perceive it in either. The Papists are convinced that bread and wine are converted into flesh and blood, though to all the senses they remain bread and wine still: we Presbyterians are persuaded that our ministers are sometimes inspired, though we cannot tell when the inspiration begins or ends; and though our ministers in this case lie under the same misfortune that Hudibras did,

When with greatest art he spoke,
You'd think he talked like other folk;

so it unluckily fares with them, when they pray most by inspiration, they only pray like
other

other people; and all my attention and skill has never been able to discover the inspiration in one single instance: but, by the method that I am proposing, we shall discover that the inspiration immediately begins when the minister departs from the established form; and perhaps we may make another discovery; I mean that the rage of party, the spirit of pride and enthusiasm, as frequently inspire our ministers, as the spirit of peace and love. In a word, let those ministers who have pride enough to believe, and presumption to affirm, that they are inspired, and can find people so ignorant and credulous as to believe them, or so tame and indifferent as to trust their devotions to an imaginary inspiration, let these, I say, use the present method, but have pity upon us who see the difficulty, disadvantages, and great danger, of our present way of worship.

As we cannot find in scripture any promise of such a gift, as we are convinced that there can be no need of it, unless we suppose that the Holy Ghost has not fully revealed the will of God for our salvation, as we are absolutely certain that you are not all inspired, and have no reason to believe that any one of you is so, we presume most humbly and most earnestly to request, that some pious form of prayer may be composed and authorized. The only inspiration that is promised in scripture that is necessary, or that can be useful, is, that the Holy Spirit will inspire the hearts of

of the faithful with affections proper for this important duty; such as shame and sorrow in confession, an humble Christian hope of obtaining what we ask in our petitions, gratitude and love in our thanksgiving, and such other affections as are suitable to the several parts of prayer; and no man, I believe, will say that the Holy Spirit cannot, or prove that he will not, inspire our hearts with these affections as easily and as readily when we pray by a form, as when we pray without one. And, as far as prayer may be considered as one of the means of inspiring these affections, a form seems better calculated to answer that purpose in public assemblies than extemporary effusions: for in the extemporary way the hearer, if he has any sense of the nature and importance of prayer, must begin the duty with a trembling heart, and go through it with a continual diffidence, as he trusts it entirely to the discretion of another man; sometimes to a man whom he never saw before, and always to a man who has not so much as calmly considered it himself. He must often suspend his assent when he is not satisfied of the propriety of the expression; he must lose the sense where the sentence is intricate; and, through the whole, be in perplexity, suspicion, fear, and real danger. Whereas, when prayers are offered by a form no word needs escape him, he understands every word, he perceives the connexion of every sentence; and, let the minister's judg-

ment be ever so weak, his learning ever so little, his manner of expressing himself perplexed, his principles pernicious, his passions ever so keen, and his party prejudices ever so violent, yet, in spite of all these, he offers a reasonable service, and breathes forth the warm feelings of his soul in decent, devout, heart-affecting and heart-approved prayers. This observation may in a great measure obviate the second objection; I mean, that a form of prayer does not so much enliven the devotion of the people: but I beg leave further to observe, that they who are used to worship in the extemporary way cannot be competent judges in this case; because they have not fairly made the experiment, but reason only from speculation. When they drop into a place where forms are used, they come in with strong prejudices, they are entire strangers to the form, and are perplexed in all the parts of it.—It happens with them in this case, as it does with men in every other thing; what they have not been accustomed to appears strange, what they are unacquainted with seems perplexed, and what they do not know reasons for is apt to appear unreasonable. It may be too, that the ignorant miss the unnatural cant, the frantick gestures, and fearful distortions of the face, that in their opinion are essential parts of prayer. But let a man of sense and candour make himself master of a form, and try the experiment for a year or two by attending carefully to prayers offered in that way, and then, and not till then, will he be able

able to determine whether the form or the extemporary method has the noblest effect to enliven his devotions. At least it is certain, that many who have tried both give their opinion in favour of a form; and that they who use a form of prayer constantly affirm that they feel it ten times more enlivening, and better calculated to inspire devout affections, than extemporary effusions. And there must be something in it, because the professors of all religions under the sun have chosen this method; the Christian church universally used it till the fifteenth century, and indeed may be said to do so at present, for we make such a small part of the catholick church, that our practice hardly deserves to be considered as an exception.

I shall not dwell long upon the speculative arguments that are offered by either side, because ingenious men will always find something plausible to say in defence of a practice that answers their purposes. They who use forms say that their minds are free from all distraction and fear, and have nothing else to do but attend to the object of their prayers, and maintain upon their minds a constant and lively sense of the importance of the business in which they are engaged, free from the care of examining every sentence before they offer it as their petition; secure that no indecent or unchristian expression can mix with their devotions, being already satisfied of the propriety of the whole form. They say that the

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mind of man is not able to attend to many things at once, and that, in our way of worship, if the people offer a reasonable service they must examine every sentence, hear every word, and understand every word they hear; that they must remember what went before, if they would conceive the connexion, that they must unravel what is expressed in a perplexed manner, if they would pray with judgment; and, in fine, that they must give their amen to their prayers with a more superficial examination of them, and a much less perfect knowledge of their contents, than they would venture to set their subscription to an address to their superiors upon earth.

We answer, that the novelty and variety of the expression in our extemporary method help to fix the mind and keep up the attention; they ask us upon what is the mind fixt upon, the object and matter of our prayers, or upon the novelty and variety of expression? If we say upon the object and matter of our prayers, they will tell us that there are in these neither novelty nor variety to assist us; because our prayers are always addressed to that Being who is *the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever*, and the matter of our prayers in publick must always be nearly the same: but if our minds be fixed upon the variety of the expression, or novelty of the phrase, they say, and I fear they speak truth, that this is not prayer, but mere amusement; such as the mind receives from musick, a song, or an entertaining piece
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of history; that it might perhaps prepare the mind for prayer, but is not prayer any more than a sermon is prayer.

It is evident that many of our ministers are sensible that their people attend only to the outward circumstances of their prayers, and that the way to be popular is to tickle their ears with strange sounds, or please their eyes with antick gestures; else why do many of them affect such an unmanly whining cant? Why use such dismal heavy tones, and draw out their words to such an immoderate length? Or why do they affect such distortions in their faces? All the world will acknowledge that these are neither necessary nor useful parts of prayer, unless to please the silly vulgar, who regard little more than the sound and circumstances of our prayers.

But whatever weight may be in the speculative arguments upon either side, experience and matter of fact are fairly against us; for they who say that forms of prayer enliven devotion seem, by a certain decency observable amongst them in time of service, to confirm what they say; while the visible inattention and indifference of our congregations flatly contradict our arguments, and prove to the very senses, that our extemporary prayers do not enliven our devotions. In assemblies where forms are used there is at least the appearance of devotion and an air of seriousness. None of them are seen sleeping in time of service, few of them gazing about them, not one of them

ever presumes, unless in a case of absolute necessity, to remove till the whole service be ended: and they frequently meet in publick for the business of prayer, which * Mr. For-dyce justly complains we never do, and seems to think that it would be very difficult to persuade our people to it. Thus the practice of those who use forms of prayer proves to me, more effectually than all the speculative arguments that can be offered, that they have an higher opinion of the great duty of publick prayer, feel a greater pleasure from it, or are, some way or other, more affected by it, than our people are. Whereas in our assemblies there is not so much as the air of devotion, not even the outward appearance of seriousness and attention; many are sleeping, more gazing about them, and all of *them* † *betray a visible impatience till prayer is over, that they may be entertained with something more to their liking*; when sermon is over do we not see them remove in crowds, though one half of our service, and that the most solemn half, still remains? Perhaps it may be thought that this is not a fair account of the matter, and that I misrepresent things. Will you believe your own brethren? they shall vouch what I have said. Let us first hear Mr. Bennet's report of the devotion of our brethren in England ‡: "That careless air, says he, which sits upon

* Edification by publick institutions. † *Ib.*

‡ Sermon upon joining in public prayer, p. 112.

the face of a congregation when engaged in prayer, shews how little they know of the matter, and how few seriously join in publick and solemn prayer; some gaze about them, others fall asleep—others fix their eye it may be on the minister, and are affected with what he says, but then they only hear him pray, and are moved with the prayer, just as they hear sermons, and are moved thereby; a most lively picture of our public worship! I must profess to you, should the enemies of our way of worship be present to observe us, there is nothing I should be so much ashamed of as our exceedingly careless, irreverent, indelicate manner of joining in public prayer." So far Mr. Bennet bears witness to the want of devotion in congregations in England, where extemporary prayers are used: let us now see if this way of worship has any better success or happier effects amongst us here in Scotland. Alas, it is every where the same unnatural, unreasonable, lifeless thing. Let Mr. Fordyce speak for the Scotch congregations. "I doubt not, my brethren," speaking to the clergy, "but you have frequently observed when the minister of God has been addressing him in the name and as the mouth of the people, the greatest part of them seem to be doing any thing, rather than joining in the solemn service: in reality there is no exercise of a spiritual nature which the generality seem to regard so little, or to attend so listlessly; seem, did I say, the ex-

pression is much too feeble; their insensibility, their irreverence in this respect are, from the whole of their deportment, most shamefully distinguishable and flagrant*." If this be true, as indeed it is the very *truth*, I may be allowed to add, that it is most shamefully impudent in us to alledge that forms of prayer deaden the devotion of the people, and that our extemporary method enlivens it. The little respect, nay visible contempt, that our people shew of publick prayers, prove more clearly than all speculative arguments that can be offered, that our present way of worship is very ill calculated for enlivening the devotions of the people. I have proved by two unexceptionable witnesses, and, had it been consistent with the brevity I proposed, could have produced many more, to prove that our devotion is not only dead, but wants even all appearance of life. In truth it needs no proof; for every Sunday will shew that we want attention and reverence to this most important duty; and every impartial heart will tell its owner, if he understands the nature of prayer, that it is very difficult to join in our public worship as it is at present performed; that it is impossible to do it rationally; that it cannot be attempted without great danger; and that in fact he does it very seldom, and even then in a very faint and lifeless manner.

* Edification by public institutions.

Allow

Allow me next to consider the third objection offered against forms of prayer. I mean that the wants of a congregation cannot be so fully expressed in that way, as by the extemporary method. This objection supposes that a number of the most learned and pious men of the age, for such I imagine would be employed, deliberately composing a form of prayer, calmly recollecting the matter of it, frequently reviewing the whole, furnished with all the antient and modern liturgies, directed by all that has been written on the subject, and assisted by every one that wishes well to religion and virtue, are more likely to omit some necessary petition, than a single person, perhaps of very indifferent talents, and a very moderate education, trusting entirely to an extemporary invention, and to his own memory. The man who can suppose this hardly deserves to be reasoned with; for it is evident that in the first case our prayers will be brought as near perfection as possible; and that, in the second, many things must be omitted, many injudiciously expressed, many needlessly repeated, and the whole tinged with weakness, passions, and party principles of the speaker; and that his best performances will be as much inferior to a general form of prayer, as he himself is in discretion, learning, and judgment, to the greatest men that have wrote upon the subject, and to a number of men of the best hearts, and calmest, ablest heads, convened to compose the form. The

wants, and consequently the matter of the petitions, of a Christian congregation, must in the main be always the same; they will at all times have sins to confess, still have need to ask pardon, and to implore the divine grace to direct their thoughts, words, and actions; it will ever be their duty to pray for all ranks of men, &c. If any general calamity should happen, such as war, famine, or pestilence, proper forms may be provided; in private cases perhaps it might be more for the honour of our religion, and decency of our worship, that we did not descend to the particular circumstances so much as we do. It is needless to describe the disease to an omniscient God; most cases of this nature might be comprehended under the general names of sickness and distress; but if it be thought proper to deal with Almighty God as we do with an ordinary doctor, and to lay the case before him at full length, methods may be found to indulge the humour of the clergy in this respect, without leaving our whole worship to their discretion, and putting all our publick petitions in their power.

Should the spiritual condition of a congregation be altered, if it possibly can alter so much that the established form could not comprehend the case, which, in my humble opinion, cannot happen if the form be well composed, let the presbytery, synod, or commission of the assembly, be applied to; and, the case being calmly considered, its nature
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and tendency deliberately examined, and its truth and certainty ascertained, let a form of prayer be composed suitable to the case: but this is too delicate, too dangerous, and difficult an affair to be trusted to the discretion or capacity of any one clergyman; for weakness or villany in this respect has more than once dishonoured our publick prayers with the grossest enthusiasm, perverted them to serve very bad purposes, and exposed the most solemn part of our service, as well as religion itself, to the ridicule of infidels.

In a word, the ordinary wants of a Christian congregation may, nay must, be more fully expressed by a form of prayer than by extempore effusions; and extraordinary cases, after they are discovered and examined, may easily be provided for; and it is not only possible, but very easy, to provide for all cases that ought to be particularly mentioned in our publick prayers in the first composition of them. But, to prevent all wrangling upon this subject, and, if possible, to content the most self-sufficient clergyman, let there be a proper place in this proposed form of prayer where the minister may have liberty to pray for all extraordinary cases in what words he thinks proper. It is better that a small part of our worship be exposed to the indiscretion, ignorance, and passions of the parson, than that the whole should be liable, as it is at present, to be made the property of faction, to be tinctured with the prejudices and whimsical

sical opinions of every private minister, and offered upon the pernicious principles of the deist, or the extravagant notions of the enthusiast.

I shall not dwell long upon the last objection, I mean that forms of prayer are unlawful, because I believe it never will be offered by men of sense or learning; and it is losing time and pains to reason with such as are destitute of both. I shall only beg leave to observe, that they who say that forms of prayer are unlawful, in fact say that God Almighty commanded, that our Saviour attended, used, and taught his disciples, an unlawful way of worship; for that he did so, I have proved already, and our own directory for publick worship acknowledges that "Our Lord's prayer is not only a pattern for prayer, but itself a most comprehensive prayer." Here I cannot help observing with regret, that wherever our directory directs well, there our clergy have despised our directory; for instance, it recommends that the Lord's prayer be used in our publick worship; that ordinarily a chapter out of each testament be read at every meeting: the first is neglected by most, and the last by all of them. It directs that our worship begin with prayer, but now it begins with praise; that the minister before worship shall solemnly exhort the people to the worshipping of the great name of God, but at present we rush into a very solemn part of worship without a word of previous exhortation, and I fear very
often

often without a serious thought. It is easy to find out the reason why the Lord's prayer and the reading of the scriptures have been justled out of our service; they have been forced out to make room for *maſs* John's *more maſterly performances*; but why the other alterations have been made, the clergy who direct all things can only tell. To them I leave it, and reſume my ſubject.—If forms are unlawful, we are unlawfully baptized, for that is done by a form; and all the extemporary prayers which we uſe upon that occaſion are not eſſential to the ſacrament, and are additions of men. We adminiſter the Lord's ſupper in an unlawful manner, for we do it by a form, I mean the words of the firſt institution; we are diſmiſſed every Lord's day with an unlawful bleſſing, for one of the ſolemn forms, with which the apoſtles conclude their epiſtles, is always uſed upon that occaſion; ſo that nothing can be more inconſiſtent with ingenuity and common ſenſe than for us to cry out againſt forms, when the moſt ſolemn and important parts of our religion and worſhip are performed in that way, and when we neither baptize nor communicate, nor bleſs our congregations in a lawful way, unleſs forms be lawful, nor do theſe things in the beſt manner, unleſs doing them by a form be the beſt.

But further; if forms of prayer be not acceptable to God, and an uſeful way of worſhip for ourſelves, we groſſly offend every time that we meet in church; for it is impoſſible
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to sing eighteen or twenty lines of a psalm but we offer some important petition by a form, and some psalms might be pointed out that are almost continued prayers; so that unless we will affirm that our prayers are acceptable to God, and useful to ourselves when they are sung, but otherwise when they are said by a form, we must allow that we are inconsistent with ourselves when we cry out against forms; and that our ministers impose upon us when they spirit us up against that way of worship, that they may have the better opportunity to gratify their own vanity to manufacture our prayers after their own manner, and to mix them up with their own private opinions.

If extemporary worship be preferable, what good reason can be given why the ministers do not sing psalms extempore in our names as well as offer extemporary prayers? for we are as much concerned to join in the last as in the first; a blunder in the one is as dangerous as in the other, and we could as well go along with him in our hearts, when he sung an extempore psalm, as we can do when he says an extempore prayer. This inconsistency in our worship has not entirely escaped the observation of our brethren, for many of them have warmly insisted upon it that the Spirit of God is restrained by using the psalms of David*, and therefore proposed that we should sing as well as pray extempore; and, upon the supposition that

* Heylin's History of the Presbyterians.

publick worship in the extemporary way is most rational, they were certainly in the right; for no good reasons can be given for praising God by forms that will not be equally good for praying to him in the same way; and no objection can be offered against the last, that will not be as strong against the first: for instance, if we say that praying to God by forms, deadens the devotion of the people, so will praising him by forms too. If forms of prayer restrain the influences of the Holy Spirit, so must forms of praise. If forms of prayer cannot express all the wants of a Christian congregation, neither will forms of praise comprehend all the causes for which a Christian congregation may have reason to praise God; especially as the forms we use were composed several thousand years ago, and calculated chiefly for the Jewish religion and worship. If forms of prayer be unlawful in themselves, so must our forms of praise, because, as I observed before, they are often real prayers.

Supposing that extemporary worship was more acceptable to God, and useful to ourselves, no man in a congregation can reap the benefit of it but the parson. Our laity are most grossly mistaken if they imagine that they pray extempore by our present method; for if they pray in the words of the minister, and in his words they must pray if they join at all in publick worship, they are as much confined to a form as any other people. For example, if the minister says, *most gracious God,*
forgive

forgive us our sins, preserve us from danger, and provide for our necessities: if the people repeat these words, either in their minds, or with their mouths, or both, it is evident that they pray as much by a form as if the prayer had been composed a thousand years ago; in fact it is impossible for a congregation to join in worship otherways than by a form, and all the difference is, that we worship by a form with which we are entirely unacquainted; a form that we have never seen nor examined before; a form that is trusted to the discretion and ability of the parson for the time, and which the minister himself has never once read over, nor examined, even in the slightest manner. It is hard to determine whether his presumption in putting a form of a prayer into our mouths that he has never examined, or our complaisance in using a form that neither we nor our minister have ever once read over, is most unaccountable. But that either he or we should imagine that to worship God in this manner is most rational for us, or most acceptable to him, is such an instance of the strength of prejudice, and the effects of education, as no man could have thought possible, had it not been proved by experience. For in fact it is to imagine that our worship is the more rational the more we are strangers to the words and matter of our prayers, and the less access we have had to satisfy ourselves of the propriety of our petitions, and the more confidence we repose in another man.

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That our worship will be the more acceptable to the Deity, the less care and pains that is taken about the words or matter of it by the parson, or the people; and that our prayers will be so much the sooner heard, the less chance they have to be expressed in proper words, or to consist of pious and reasonable petitions. We may sometimes have a better or worse form, according to the judgment and capacity of the minister, but we must always have a very defective one; and our very best form must be as far inferior to a national well composed liturgy as the learning, judgment, and memory, of one man is to the abilities and calm reflection of a number of the most learned and judicious men of the age. I must confess that I have often beheld with indignation the parson pulling out his papers for the sermon, when he trusted the prayer to his invention and memory; not that I have prejudice against reading of sermons, or am not convinced that it is the best method, unless the minister be a man of extraordinary parts, of extensive learning, and blessed with a very good memory; but that I look upon it as an affront offered to God and the congregation, and very absurd in this instance, as it shews that the minister is less concerned about the propriety and decency of his address to his God, than to his people, and that he is more afraid of a blunder in his sermon than in his worship; or, at least, that he thinks either that mistake in the last is of less consequence
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than in the first, or that it is an easier matter to pray than to preach well. I own that he has reason to believe that any thing like a prayer will pass with the bulk of the people, because in truth they do not regard it much; but this should never induce him to shew that he is as careless about the matter and words of their prayers as they are themselves, and that he takes more care and pains to please them by his sermons than to offer their prayers in a concise and proper manner.

I have often heard the members of our church, when the difficulties and danger of our present way of worship have been fairly laid before them, satisfy themselves by saying, that most of our ministers had a form of prayer which they used, and with which by length of time their people became very well acquainted. I believe it may be true that most of them naturally fall into a form, but if we will believe themselves, and they certainly know best, it is rather by chance than by design, and of consequence more by good luck than good management, or much care, if the form they fall into be a good one. However it is here granted that the worshipping God by a form is not only lawful and reasonable, but also necessary; and, if this be the case, why should not our worship be rendered uniform by an established general form of prayer? why should it not be brought as near perfection as possible, by the judgment, piety, and learning of our ablest ministers, and other members of our

our church, conferring together upon the subject? why should not this form of prayer be communicated to the laity, that we may examine and approve of it? Is the parson's form such a secret that we may not see and examine it for ourselves? is it any advantage to our worship that he may alter, curtail, or enlarge it, as his passions or prejudices chance to direct, and warp into his form any whimsical opinions that he chances to embrace? We must, notwithstanding of his form, go to the church with a trembling heart, as we know not but some minister may officiate whose form of prayer we never have heard, our own minister may have changed his, or some unlucky and indecent petition may be thrown in, as he has it in his power to do as he pleases.

At the same time it is true that our ministers, who carefully compose and constantly use a form of prayer, do as much as they can, in their present circumstances, to render our worship pure and rational, and to assist the devotions of their people; and therefore deserve their esteem and thanks: but yet it is evident that these private forms have no great chance of being so full and perfect, and that they have but few of the advantages of a general established form of prayer, and many of the disadvantages of the extemporary method.

It has been often urged in defence of extempore publick prayers, that the apostles used that way of worship. If they did so, they did more than their Master either taught them, or

gave them an example of, as far as we can judge. But, supposing that it were proved, which it has not yet been, and I doubt never will be, that the apostles used extemporary publick prayer, I am afraid we shall not be able to infer from thence that our ministers should pray extempore, or that the people should trust every one of them with the composition and direction of their publick worship; unless it could be also proved that every one of them is directed by immediate inspiration. I have often blushed for our ministers when I have heard them urge this argument, as it is so weak and inconclusive in itself, and betrays so much presumption and self sufficiency in them; for in fact it is putting our present ministers upon a level with the apostles. Some days ago I was passing by Bedlam, and observed one of its wretched inhabitants wrestling with a great iron gate. I asked him what he was about: he told me, with an air of importance, that his name was Samson, and that he meant to carry up that gate to the top of an opposite hill, as his namesake did the gates of Gaza. I did not stay to convince him that Samson was endued with miraculous strength, but I could not help thinking that there was a great resemblance in his way of reasoning, or rather running mad, to the argument in hand; for the apostles were endued with miraculous gifts as much superior to the abilities of our present ministers, as Samson's strength was to that of the poor bedlamite: they lived in an
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age in which miraculous gifts, by the goodness of God, were common in the church; but in our time there is nothing miraculous, unless it be the self-sufficiency and presumption of the clergy in taking upon them to offer an extemporary address to their Maker, and each of them claiming a right to make a whole parish pray as he pleases; and the absurd confidence reposed in them by the laity, and the tame submission by which they suffer every man that chances to fill their pulpits to manufacture and mix up their prayers as he chooses. These indeed are miraculous things, such as no age, no country, no religion, ever produced examples of; and it is still more surprising that the clergy themselves, as I have proved before, see and publish to the world, that the people do not join in publick worship; and the most learned and sensible part of the laity feel and acknowledge that it is very difficult and dangerous for them to join in it as it is performed at present; and yet that none of our clergy have compassion and humility to propose, nor any of the laity resolution to demand, a change; but that all of them sit down with an absurd and dangerous way of worship, introduced partly by necessity and partly by enthusiasm, in the distracted days of our reformation; disapproved of by our ablest reformers from the beginning, as witness John Knox, who composed and used a form of prayer, and only approved of and supported by the silly ignorant vulgar, who have so little knowledge

either of the nature or importance of prayer, that they would not give themselves the trouble to go to church unless it were to hear a sermon; and, by the turbulent and self-sufficient part of the clergy, who find that it gives them a fair opportunity to sow discord, propagate faction, and prostitute our worship to their foolish fondness for popularity. That the mob who place great merit in hearing many sermons, and think preaching the most important part of publick worship, should be fond of our present method, is no wonder at all, for our extemporary effusions are rather sermons than prayers. It is natural too for the ambitious, enthusiastical, and libertine parts of our clergy to be warmly attached to our present way of worship; it most effectually answers their several purposes, it affords the ambitious a large field for displaying their popular talents, and an excellent opportunity to *preach themselves*; it gives enthusiasts and libertines fair scope to vent their whimsical and pernicious principles. Indeed nothing can be better calculated for propagating sedition, heresy, enthusiasm, and party principles, than our present way of worship, since every minister has the composition of most of it, and the choice and management of the whole; so that it is no wonder if men of these characters be fond of it, nay it would be very surprising if they could be persuaded to give up our present method.

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But it is not easy to conceive why the learned, orthodox, and pious part of our clergy, who have no other views but the good of souls and the glory of God, have not endeavoured to remedy these ills, by composing and authorising such a form of prayer as might enable every congregation in the kingdom to offer their prayers upon truly Christian principles: or how it comes to pass that the sensible and pious part of our laity, though they can hardly miss to see that it is inconsistent with religion and common sense, to trust the most solemn part of our worship to the discretion, honesty, and ability, often of strangers whom they have never seen before, and always of individuals, of whose weakness and folly they have many instances, choose to run such a terrible risk.

CONCLUSION.

I have contributed my poor mite to deliver the laity from the hardships and danger to which they are exposed by our present way of worship; and as, I think, I have made it obvious that the present method is attended with great inconveniences and eminent danger to us poor lay-men, I may likewise hope that the rulers of our church will lay our case to heart, and take such methods as may enable us to offer a rational service to the great source of reason, and to lift up holy hands without perplexity, fear, or danger. While our case continues as it is, our churches may indeed be crowded by
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those who have not sense to see their danger, nor attention to perceive upon how many opposite principles they are made to pray, persons who have never perhaps in all their lives reflected upon the nature and importance of prayer, and come to church partly because it is the custom, or at most to hear a sermon; but they who consider the nature and importance of publick worship will hardly choose, in a thing of so great consequence, to be blindfolded and led by the parson.

With all humility, and due deference, I submit the whole to your consideration, more extensive learning, and better judgment, and to the candid reflection of all pious Christians; and am, with the greatest respect,

Reverend Fathers,

Your most obedient

and most humble servant,

5 OC59

A. T. BLACKSMITH.

Inverary, May 8,
1758.

